Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D. D.

Year: 1969	*SERMON TITLE*	*TEXT*
January 5	"Pearl Of Great Price"	Matthew 13:45-46
January 12	"About The Church"	
January 26	"What's It All About Anyway?"	
February 2	"God Of The Lost " - - Straying Sheep	Luke 15
February 9	Anniversary Sermon-Messiah	
February 16	"God Of The Lost"	Luke 15
February 23	Who Are You Jesus? Series: "Bread Of Life"	
MISSING March 2	Who Are You Jesus? Series: "Good Shepherd"	
MISSING March 9	Who Are You Jesus? Series: "The Way, The truth, The Life"	
MISSING March 16	Who Are You Jesus? Series: "The Door"	
MISSING March 23	Who Are you Jesus? Series: "The Resurrection and The Life"	
March 30	"Pilgrimage of The Soul"	
April 6	Easter Day - 1969	
April 13	Easter Revisited	
April 20	"Straying Sheep"	
April 27	"Praying Men"	Luke 18:9-14
May 4	"Sons Of The World"	
May 11	"The Christian Home"	
May 18	"Rich Fool"	Luke 12:13-21
May 25	"On Whom The Spirit Came"	Acts 2:1-4

1969- continued	*SERMON TITLE*	*TEXT*
June 1	Communion Meditation	
June 8	Baccalaureate Sermon	
June 15	"Bread Beggars"	Luke 11: 5-13
June 22	"Banquet Giver"	Luke 14: 15-24
June 29	"Five – Two – One"	Matthew 25: 14-30
July 6	"How To Handle The Inevitable"	Jeremiah 42: 14
August 3	"What is Man?"	Psalm 8
August 10	"The Highway Which Is Life"	Luke 10
August 17	"The Glory Of The Lord"	Exodus 16: 17
August 24	"Thoughts At Random On A Saint's Day"	
August 31	"The Traveler-With-The-Difference"	Luke 10
September 7	"The Issue"	Matthew 20: 6-7
September 14	"When Evil Rumors Spread"	II Corinthians 6:8-10
September 21	"A Man Named Matthew"	Matthew 9:9
September 28	"Pageant Of Triumph"	Ephesians 4:1
October 5	Our "This-Also-" God	
October 19	"__ Of Common MERCIES	Psalm 51:15
October 26	"The Church In Changing Society"	I Timothy 3: 15
November 2	"The Blessed"	Matthew 5: 1-12
November 9	"If I Had Only One Sermon To Preach"	
November 16	""To Touch Off Rockets In Their Souls"	Luke 15:1
November 23	"Ready? For What?"	Matthew 25: 1-13

1969- continued	*SERMON TITLE*	*TEXT*
November 30	"The Good News Of Christmas: I - - To Whom?"	Luke 2: 10-11
December 7	"The Good News Of Christmas: II - - When?"	Luke 2: 10-11
December 14	"The Good News Of Christmas: III- - Where?"	Luke 2: 10-11
December 21	"The Good News Of Christmas: IV- - What?"	Luke 2: 10-11
December 24	"And You Will Find - A Baby"	
December 28	"- - And His Mother "	Matthew 2:13

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Second Sunday After Christmas January 5, 1969

"PEARL OF GREAT PRICE"
Matthew 13:45-46)

Aside from what interruptions we may have in the schedule during Advent and also during the Lenten-tide, let me remind you that the sermons for the most part to be preached from this pulpit from last September until next June are constantly referring us to the parables spoken by our Blessed Lord in which He told us what the Kingdom of Heaven is like.

Today, it's like a pearl of great price; and the text, the 45th and the 46th verses of the 13th chapter of Matthew:

> "Again the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls: and having found one pearl of great price, he went, sold all that he had, and bought it."

I'm not quite certain how you look back to those days in Galilee when Jesus Christ was growing up. If for a moment you allow yourself to think that He sat in the corner, with folded hands and bowed head, and gave Himself without any interruption whatsoever to prayer and meditation, I dare say you are absolutely mistaken. Not that He was without being made aware of the nearness of God at any time, but whatever you think of it, allow yourself the precious thought that He was all eyes, He was all ears....He was as active as they come.

He was fascinated by any number of things. The usual things that thrilled people in Nazareth surely caught His attention -- the things that would capture the imagination of any growing boy had a way of putting a spring into His step, and a light in His eye. In all likelihood when news came to Nazareth that a treasure had been found in a field, He was as excited as anyone. For this kind of thing spread like wildfire. It was not at all unlikely that treasure should

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be found. For you see, in those days, the country was being occupied by another power, and one was never quite certain what the future would have in store for them. And if a man had been able to accumulate anything of value, he wanted to hold on to it as best he could. He wasn't sure that he could trust whatever banking institutions they had in those days, and he was never quite certain what the government might do next. So he looked for the safest place in which he might put the thing that he valued highly.....money, jewels, gems of any sort.

There was no question about it, the safest place in which to hide anything was the good earth. So undoubtedly under cover of darkness a man would go, without so much as saying a single word to his wife or any of his kinfolk where he was going or what he was about to dd....and he would safely hide his treasure. He kept the secret to himself, and with life being as it is, sometimes a man would die without ever being able to re-claim his treasure from the phce in which it had been concealed.

So it was that men plowing the field suddenly would come upon the hidden treasure. They would do everything they could to keep the secret to themselves. Like as not, the field in which a man would be plowing would be a field owned by somebody else, which would mean therefore the man who had title to the property was entitled to the treasure. So the plowman, with a discerning eye, would go back to his town, quietly as possible muster together whatever resources that he had, and then buy the property for himself. Every now and then a man would give up <u>everything</u> that he had in order to have the deed to that particular plot where he knew the treasure was. Then he'd let it be known.....

...that carpenter's lad was all ears when word was passed around like this in that village of Nazareth.

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Or can't you picture Him, running eagerly in and out of the bazaar, listening to what was going on, particularly when the merchantmen came from afar - - he was recognized easily, he was the pearl merchant. And he had passed the word around in the village bazaar that he was looking for a pearl of great price.....he allowed it to be known in advance, as though he wanted everybody to be on the look-out for it, and he gave them to understand that if they were to find it he would be willing to pay the price, even if he had to sacrifice everything else that he owned, so great was his desire to have the pearl....

...so that eager-eyed, open-eared carpenter's son was deeply impressed.

Here you have the stuff out of which sermons were eventually to come. And years later when He became the itinerant preacher, He could draw upon this experience and draw upon that experience, and He would say, "And this is the way it is with the Kingdom of Heaven - - it's like coming upon hidden treasure! - - it's like discovering the pearl of great price."

In my judgment, one of John Steinbeck's better works, if not his best one, is an interesting little story. It's the story of a man who was an Indian who one day discovered the pearl of great price. The story unfolds around this pearl, the discovery of the pearl, the possession of the pearl, the desire to get the pearl ....completely transforms the life of that man, his family and the entire community. The drama unfolds according to the music of evil, and the dominating force that prevails in the story is a man's tenacious grasp upon the pearl of great price, and the grasping on the part of others who would steal it away from him. He's plagued by his precious possession. Finally, caught up in all the evil that's unleashed by the desire to get the pearl, his

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only child is killed....and the story ends with Ke-no going to the water's edge, and with all his strength that he can possibly muster, throwing the pearl away, never wanting to have anything to do with it at all, and hoping that no one else will ever find it.

Steinbeck has one of the characters in the little story say: "It is not good to want a thing too much. For if you want it too much, it can do something to your life. One has to be very careful, one has to be very tactful, even with God, or with the gods."

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It is a majestic line in the little story. It is not good to want a thing too much, but perchance it's all in what you may want, and also in what you do with what you would get. A man is by nature the unsatisfied one. Now there's a difference between being dissatisfied and unsatisfied. But man, made in God's image, is always reaching out for something better -- if he's to know any degree of fulfillment, seemingly forever unsatisfied with what he has. So the carpenter's son had this realistic reading of life -- they were the unsatisfied ones in those days. Men were searching, men were grasping, men were pushing, men were pounding, men were purloining -- always reaching for something else, seemingly unsatisfied.

It's interesting to note -- two things that need to be said.

The man that came upon the treasure in the field came upon it accidentally, yet the treasure was found. The pearl merchant when he found the pearl of great price, found it because he was looking for it. Now the deduction that remains after both of these things have been said is that life itself is like a treasure-trove....life is never without its pearl of great price...life is never without its treasured item. It's always there.

But having said all this, one goes on to say very quickly that there had to be the discerning eye. The plowman had to recognize the worth of the thing that he's discovered...and when the pearl merchant came upon the pearl of great price he had to be able to detect it for what it was and to know that it wasn't paste, that it was the real thing. The tragedy for many people is this, not that they won't reach, not that they lack desire, but it's the inability to recognize the true worth of a thing.

If you've been listening to preaching for any amount of years at all, you've already heard this kind of illustration, and a true story it is. There was a chap of much promise, an artist. But as was true for many of them, they never were quite able to make a living, and from the very beginning there were always those who could never see the promise that was latent. This was the story of this artist.

...his impatient landlady said, "You must go. Now to make up for what you already owe me, give me something." He gave her the only four paintings that he had. She allowed herself to believe that, at least I've gotten something. She could not recognize their worth. Not one to throw anything away, she tucked them away in the attic.....until one day someone happened to come, and when he went through her attic his eye fell upon the four paintings, and immediately he recognized them as the work of a man who is now a very famous artist. Without saying much to the landlady, he bought them, for almost a pittance. He took them immediately to the artist, who admitted that they were his, and then he signed them for the new owner - - the great treasure, for the new owner....the pearl of great price. But only because he was able to discern and to see it for what it was.

There comes a time when a man should be made ready to recognize the true

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worth of a thing. But what if the treasure has been reached, and he's blind to its value? Sadder yet could be his unwillingness to pay the price, which is simply to say, to let go his grasp of the cheaper in order to possess the gem. That carpenter's son, Jesus Christ, was fully aware that men were always looking for something better. Jesus Christ was fully convinced that only in the Kingdom of God would a man find true satisfaction. Therefore He says, "The Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God must be like this " - - - a man's desire to be part of it, and to pay the price.

For the Kingdom of God comes both as a gift and as a reward, which is simply to say, it's appreciated only by those who are willing to release their grasp upon the lesser. For the Kingdom of God is never forced into any man's hands, nor is it forced into any man's heart. Wonderful as it is, God never removes from any single person the element of responsibility to make the decision. Beloved, I stand before you with all the ardor of my soul to raise the question: Can you recognize the treasure which is yours in the Kingdom of Heaven? If you're among those who find life unsatisfying, why should you look any further, for within the Kingdom of Heaven there is peace, there is power, there is pardon. If I did not believe that I would not want to come back to this desk another Sunday.

Let me be as specific as possible. God always places before us the treasured thing - - this <u>place</u> is treasured in God's sight. For when these walls were erected, were they not erected as a place wherein it could be made easier for people to think the thoughts of God? And is not this a treasured thing in God's sight, where people can find it <u>easier</u> to think the thoughts of His Kingdom? This coming together, this gathering of people - - is not this a treasured thing in God's sight? When one remembers the forces at work in this world that divide people, that alienate people, that establish estrangement - - this Holy

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Spirit of God which draws us together -- properly understood, every single one of us is here because he's been responding to the Holy Spirit. And this is a treasured thing. Even in the world you find people who gather together because they are intent upon evil.....properly understood, we're drawn together by God, as a people whose intentions should be to unleash good in the world, to become the instruments of compassion and the exponents of truth. This is a treasured thing! It's happening right now.

It's a treasured thing that when you came too, you should have in the primary place in the worship experience the reading of God's Word, the open Bible, the rooting and the grounding of every exposition of thought which constitutes a sermon, the sacred Scriptures. That the Bible should be ours is a treasured thing! Helmut Galwitzer, in that excellent book of his called "Unwilling Journey" tells of the experiences in the Siberian camp, how he was the only one who possessed the Bible, and the possession of it was verboten. And at night, in a very clandestine way he would conceal it. He lived day by day by the purpose and the peace that he gleaned from the Scriptures, and he gives us to understand that nobody could possibly understand unless we had been in his situation the feeling that overwhelmed him when he went uncovering the earth to find the Bible that he had hidden, only to discover that it wasn't there.....the feeling of great loss.

....these hymns that we sing when we come together - - on occasion when it's my privilege and my responsibility to sit with a family in planning for the funeral service, and if we can use hymns as we sang them so triumphantly yesterday morning, discover in so many lines of so many stanzas of so many hymns the element of comfort, and strength - - - -

(this sermon transcribed as recorded; it was incompletely recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The First Sunday After the Epiphany January 12, 1969

"ABOUT THE CHURCH"

Preachers are always receiving advice. And this in itself isn't a bad thing, for invariably we stand to benefit by those who for one reason or another have something to say to us that would hold us in good stead on the basis of their experience. If I were asked to give advice to a young preacher, I wouldn't hesitate to give it, for on the basis of my experience I think I could say at least two things to any young preacher:

-- one, make it your business to remain faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the great King and Head of the Church;

...the second bit of advice:

-- remember, you can't please everybody.

Do you know that there are some men who demit the ministry, that is, they leave the ministry after they've been in it for a while, and when they are hard-pressed for an answer, some of them have been known to say, "I just couldn't take it any longer. I tried to please everybody - - it can't be done."

The Apostle Paul stands out in my book, that itinerant tent-mender, as a great and noble soul for a number of different reasons. I presume one of them very safely could be said, he achieved a sense of balance -- he found a way to please God, to remain faithful to Jesus Christ, the great King and Head of the Church....and at the same time he was able to say what had to be said, truthfully and honestly.

Now when you recall this tent-mender-turned-preacher, you'll discover that sometimes he said things that pleased people. He loved people, and because he loved them he was able to say good things about them. You may read for your-

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self some of the letters that he wrote to the leaders of the Church, some of the letters that he wrote to certain congregations, and you can also read certain sketches from some of the sermons that he was supposed to have preached. Once he was able to say, when he wrote of a certain congregation, "I thank God every time I think of you." If that can't endear a man to a people's heart, I don't know what would. Having been separated from them for a while, he looks back, he recalls every member of the congregation, and still he's able to say, "I thank God when I think of you."

For what it may be worth to you, I think quite honestly I can say the same thing about every member of this congregation - - I thank God when I think of you. Oh, there's the parade of faces, some standing out a little bit more so than others, perhaps.....who because of their degrees of commitment and the strength of their skills and talents have made a marked contribution in the way that others might not have done....and when I think of all of you who have an abiding concern for the things of the Kingdom and want what's best for this parish under any circumstances.....when I think of all of you who pray for your church, without any hesitation in the mind and the spirit of the Apostle Paul I, too, could say, "I thank God whenever I think of you."

Well, surely when the Apostle Paul said that, that pleased the people who heard it. And yet this same preacher, when you read some of the things that he wrote, you'll find him something of an irritant -- he said some very scathing things to Christians -- he denounced certain patterns of their behavior, he had a way of branding them as being far less than what Jesus Christ knew that they ought to be, and could become. Surely this didn't serve to endear him to some people.

Well, what are you going to do? There are some people who take a preacher

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to task because they say he's always patting his congregation on the back -- he spoon-feeds them, he coddles them. Other people find fault with the preacher because every time he appears in the pulpit he thrusts upon them his own personal frustrations, and he's constantly berating his people, deriding them. Is it possible to be both, one who encourages and one who rebukes.... and at the same time be basically honest? I think so. And I think the Apostle Paul achieved it nobly.

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I have good reason to tell you that because I'm thinking particularly of the text that commands our attention as it's regarded in relationship to the sermon for today. This sermon is especially preached in the knowledge that this second Sunday in January is our Anniversary Sunday. It was 29 years ago on the second Sunday in January that this congregation was organized. So very naturally, then, the sermon bears the title, "About The Church" and the text, the 15th verse of the 3rd chapter of Paul's first letter to a man named Timothy:

> "But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

That's a good text, and stands out quite well on its own. But would you believe me that just before the Apostle Paul wrote those words he was taking his reader to task, and anybody else who might read what he had to say...

...he was talking to them about their sins....

....he was taking them to task because they were gossiping,

and he didn't believe that Christians ought to be gossips....

.....he was taking them to task because they were quarrelsome,

and he didn't believe that people who belonged to the

church of the living God ought to be quarrelsome...

...he even had something to say to them about the way they were spending their money

...he had reason to believe that some parents weren't bringing up their children in the right way....

.....he's referring to all of these things, and if that isn't meddlesome -- at least that's what some people would brand it, and it didn't make them very happy. Yet he fervently believed that there were certain things that had to be said. He didn't hesitate to say them. He was laying it on the line.

And this he felt he had to do because he was talking to them as people who ought to behave the way people ought to behave who are members of the household of God. It makes a difference when people belong to the Church, because certain things ought to flow into their lives and certain things ought to become part of the community because there is the Church.

I wonder if it would make any difference to you. Would it make any difference to this community if I were to announce that today is the last time that we'd have services in this place, if I were to announce that from this day on there would no longer be a Saint Luke Lutheran Church -- that this congregation would completely disband? Would it make any difference? Or to project it a step farther, if the whole Christian church "went out of business" would it make any difference in your life, would it make any difference in the life of the community?

When that peripatetic one, Milton J. Bieber, came into the edge of northwest Washington early in September, 1939, he was a man who was obsessed with the notion that there ought to be a particular congregation established. He worked earnestly, driven by that notion. He had no automobile, he was dependent

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upon public conveyance. Flashlight in hand, he went house to house, looking for house numbers, chasing down any prospect that might have been given to him, irritating people because he commanded attention -- whether it was convenient to be received or not, as far as he was concerned that didn't register. He only knew that he had something on his mind and he wanted to tell it. He honestly believed that a congregation ought to be established. Because he so believed, and because we believe, this congregation is still here.

But what is it that this congregation gives, if the Christian church ought to remain - - what are its characteristics? I am absolutely thrilled when I think of that man Paul for a number of different reasons....

...one, I recognize him as a man who gave himself completely to his calling. He knew no other loyalty. Jesus Christ came first, last and always. And I'm always thrilled to recognize a man whose life is dominated by something as supremely wonderful as that...

...secondly, I'm thrilled when I think of him because he had a high regard for the church.....

> ...some of you know I've become a bit weary of people who delight in down-grading the church. Do you know that there are people who tell us -- they write books, they make speeches, wanting us to believe that the church as we've known it has run its course, that it's no longer relevant, that it's no longer a useful instrument in the hand of God, and that even God himself is looking for other ways.....as much as to imply that even God himself is turning His back on the church...
> ...that's pretty strong language, and there are some people who honestly believe that our coming together, just as we've come

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together now, is a rather meaningless gesture, and makes no dent whatsoever upon society, doesn't contribute one iota to the deepening of your life spiritually.....

I personally believe that as far as God is concerned, He places a high value upon the Church, that He hasn't anything better in mind for us than what the Church is about to offer. I'll grant you that we limp along, and I'm willing to believe with Augustine that not all the saved are inside the Church, and that not all the sinners are on the outside. And I honestly believe that if the Church does fail, in this way or that way, God's not to blame. It's simply that He has to work with the likes of people such as we are. And even God has to work within the limitations that we thrust upon Him.

I do become a bit impatient with people who because of their lack of experience or their unwisdom down-grade the Church. This could happen for a number of reasons, however. One, they may not properly understand what the Church is. I salute the Apostle Paul because of the way he put it. He called it the family of God, he called it the church of the living God. He never thought of the Church aside from God! Now maybe this is our trouble -- we so often call it ours, as though we could do with it anything that we wanted to do with it, as though we could make it go in any direction that we wanted to direct it. That isn't the correct understanding of the Church. It's God's, and God is alive.

There are several characteristics that I want to speak of very quickly.

If the Church is to be properly understood, one characteristic of the Church is that it's made up of people who have responded to the call of the Holy Spirit. The whole world belongs to God, and God loves everybody, honestly He does. He even loves the people ~~who~~ you don't love, and He loves other people than you. God loves everybody. God wants to give himself freely to everybody,

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God wants to make His way known, to everybody. But not everybody responds.

Now the Church, if it's to be properly understood, is made up of those who have responded, the Church is made up of the called - - in fact that's what the word church, in the original, really means -- ecclesia.....those who are called out from. Recognize your rightful role in this body of believers - - you are a called one, my friend. Some way, somehow, God through Jesus Christ has made a claim upon you and you've answered it. He doesn't call us all in the same way, and we don't all answer in the same way, but we are given the chance to respond.

If you were to think of our coming together right now in that way, what a difference it would make psychologically in your reaction toward all the other people who are here. If I were a gambling man, I'd be inclined to think that there aren't 30 people in this place right now who could call by name 50 to 60 other people who happen to be here. There are some people who sell us short because, they say, you're a company of strangers, you don't know each other. It is true that we have a congregation at 8:30, 9:30, 11:00 o'clock, and still a number of people who come only at the Vesper Period that you may never see. But this ought not to make your coming together ineffective, my friends. If I were to say to myself, I'm here because I've heard God's call, well that's true of all the other people who are here, too - - - how different could be our reaction toward one another. The Church is characterized, we are the called.

We are the gathered ones. Whenever something has happened to a person he wants to be with other people who have had the same experience. He has a natural gravitation toward other folk when he knows that they are the same stripe, the same pattern, the same background, the same experience -- honestly! I'm somewhat amazed when I go by women's groups sometimes, and to see how peo-

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ple can be there first as a group of strangers, then suddenly they discover they have something in common, and they gravitate next time toward each other -- such little things...they discover that they have the same hair-dresser, they discover they use the same cook-book, they discover they go to the same supermarket, they discover that they belong to the same political party - - you gather together on the basis of a common interest, a common experience. Look upon the Church, then, as the company of those who have a common experience, namely, response to the call of Jesus Christ.

In the third place, the Church is to be characterized that whenever she comes together, she's given opportunity to be nurtured by Word and by Sacrament. We need to be sustained, and within the Church God uniquely has bestowed the treasured gifts of Word and Sacrament.

In the fourth place, when we come together we come together because of what's happened to us and because of what is happening to us, but we are never meant to stay there. We're gathered in order that we might be scattered, and the true mark of the Church also includes the fact that we are a scattered company, that we no sooner come together than what we're sent away from this place -- "Get going -- be on your way -- put into practice"....what's here been proclaimed, what's here been advanced as the truth of God and the love of it. Some wit has said, and properly so, "Why, the service begins when the worship ends." In a time when there's so much that takes the life out of us, remember, it's the Church that puts Life into us - - new Life.

It always bothers me a bit when I look over the congregation and I see your faces sadly drawn, as though this were a painful thing that you're enduring, as though you lament every single sedond that you spend in this hour. It ought to be a joyful experience, and I for one should be sad indeed if when the hour was over you didn't get on your way with a spring in your step, motivated and geared for action, raring to go.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Third Sunday After The Epiphany January 26, 1969

"WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT ANYWAY?"

The nearer that I came to this day, which is the Sunday just before our Annual Meeting, the more I was moved not to complete the sermon which I had been planning to preach. But rather, as I had opportunity to read page after page in the Book of Reports, and then as there was laid upon me the responsibility to preach, to prepare the opening statement, I was constrained to talk to you a little while this morning, in this hour and in this place, on the general theme, perchance, "What's It All About, Anyway?"

Let me read for you now what appears on the initial page beyond the cover -- four paragraphs under the caption "How To Read This Book" --

> " Essentially this is a book of facts and figures. Yet it is more. It is also a book of faces and forces. By the latter, of course, we mean the personalities and the influences that have been channeled through the people who consider themselves the instruments of the Holy Spirit.
>
> We are His people. We are to be in this world as Christ's feet, Christ's hands, Christ's lips, Christ's heart.
>
> Fervently we offer to God each report, each statement, each sheet of figures, each activity, each meeting as something done to His honor and to His glory.
>
> The treasury of God's grace entrusted to us is a cherished privilege. But we are human. When we have laid before Him our strengths, we have also dragged along behind us our limitations. Yet God has seen fit to use us. His love is that great."

As you scrutinize these four paragraphs, you may come to the deduction, and rightly so, that here you have both idealistic statements and inference also that's quite realistic, encouraged, undoubtedly, by what the Apostle Paul once said to a group of Christians who made up membership in certain congregations in

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a particular area. Surely they must have had moments when they wondered "what does it all mean, anyway?" - - because they had to spend so much of their time and so much of their energy just in keeping a program alive. This might be your reaction if you read this Book of Reports, the largest that we've ever prepared -- our program has become more comprehensive. Surely you'll want to reach for your copy of the Book of Reports. You'll find them at the entrances to the Nave if you have not already received a copy.

It could be a salutary thing if this afternoon you sat down and read it, page by page, from cover to cover. It might require a bit of effort on your part, for some of you, because it could be that some of you are not genuinely interested in this phase of Kingdom work or in that phase of Kingdom work. Yet the Book of Reports represents a sizeable enlistment of people and a significant investment of money and of time.

Now it could be that as you read the Book of Reports you may say to yourself, so much of this has been spent in just keeping the organization going. Such a thought is not to be ignored....

> ...you might be absolutely surprised if a circle leader were to stand up now and confess how much of her time is taken in just trying to get people to come to a meeting, trying to get people who are talented and skilled and gifted to assume responsibility....you might be surprised...
>
> ...you might be surprised, fortunate as we are in this congregation, with the type of people who comprise membership in this parish, to learn how difficult it is sometimes to get people to attend a meeting!.....yet they do not hesitate to say that they're members of the parish, and they do

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> not hesitate to draw fully upon much that's being offered to the congregation for their young people, or by any other aspect of the program. Yet to get them to enlist their time and their energy takes quite a bit of doing....just to keep the program going.

...this could be your reaction when you read this book - - how much time is spent, how much energy is expended, just to maintain a certain level of activity that could come up to last year's level of activity.

My first reaction, when I thought of this, was that this is nothing at all new! This has been true for the Church from the very beginning. You won't read it explicitly, perchance, but if you know anything at all about the history of the early Church, part of the genius of the Apostle Paul was not simply that he was a great preacher and a good theologian...but he was also a gifted and skilled church administrator. No matter where he went, he had the business of the church at heart. And he might be separated from certain congregations that he organized, and if that doesn't require time and energy -- just to organize!.....but then to keep a thing organized...

...how many letters he had to write

...how many leaders he had to train

...how many prayers he had to offer to Heaven

...whenever you think of the Apostle Paul, think of him not only as a theologian, as a founding father of congregations, but also as a gifted and skilled administrator, even in that day.

Nothing at all unusual about that, that so much time and energy would have to be spent in keeping a thing going. There isn't a single house-wife right now in this place who doesn't recognize the truth of this statement. For almost twenty-nine years I have been married to one, and I know how much of her

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time and energy, without any domestic help whatsoever, has been spent through these years, in just housekeeping chores and details...

...the laundry is done, only to have to be done again!

...one meal is prepared, only in the sober anticipation of the fact that later on, in a few hours, there's still another meal to be prepared...

...the house is clean, only with the accepted fact in mind that once it's clean, before a short while one reaches for the vacuum again, and takes a dust-cloth in hand

...just to keep the thing going. Housekeeping chores and details — who doesn't understand this? So when you read this Book of Reports you might say to yourself, meetings, organizations, programs - - what does it mean?

I told you the reference was idealistic, in the prefatory statement to the book, inspired by a reference from Scriptures, for when the Apostle Paul was writing to the Christians in Ephasus he too was caught up with the business of the church, he, too, was caught up with its ongoing activity - - he, too, was caught up with its concern for details....program, policy, people, place of meeting. And then with that tremendous insight, he wrote to the Christians in Ephasus and he said, "But remember, this whole business of the church, it's the ministry of the church, and it has one thing in mind primarily: in order to equip the saints and to build up the body of Christ."

...so it's a wise whusewife who says to herself when she's caught up with the seemingly monotonous routine chores of keeping a house going, "Why, I'm doing this for those who are part of my life and part of my love. This is an essential, this well-ordered house of mine, that my house may be for them as a haven, that this home may be as a for-

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tress, that here we might be able to nurture and to undergird those who are part of our family circle for the life that claims them beyond this home."

...when she may lament the fact that because she's caught up so much with these details that she has so little time just to be a mother, and so little time just to be a wife and devoted companion, to minister to his spirit and to their spirit.....yet soberly and realistically, and yet idealistically, if there's to be any meaningful aspect of her life she has to say, "This too is essential, this, too, is important."

So we look at Saint Luke Church, and the time and the energy and the people that we enlist - - to keep a program going. Why?

We must never lose sight of the ideal: in order to equip the saints. There are many ways to define the primary task of the Church. There are many ways to describe and to relate the mission of the Church. I beg you, with all the ardor of my soul, never to forget that one of our primary responsibilities is to equip people. "Becoming involved" is a key word these days. And the church is always telling people to go out, as well the church should. But the church must not forsake her responsibility in equipping the person so that when he goes out he has a contribution to make.

We've never done this and you'll understand why I'm doing it this morning, and I'm doing it only because it's symbolic, in behalf of all the rest of you.

.....take the one who read the Lessons this morning. We've never identified them beyond their name. The one who read the Lessons today happens to be the Principal of one of the most important high schools in metropolitan Washington. He was given a very difficult assignment more than a dozen years ago...he has acquitted himself in that responsibility, in that post, with honor and integrity. In this, one of the most critical periods that we've ever found in our history, in our rela-

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tionship with young people, and particularly in the world of education...

> ...I submit to you that when he comes to this place, when he participates in this worship service, when he identifies with this congregation, all that we purpose and all that we plan is to be aimed at equipping him as a saint.

And what is a saint? - - an agent of God! They're not perfect people. The mark of a saint is never perfection....the mark of a saint is consecration, and that's where you and I run into trouble so often. We have a way of expecting far too much. The saint is one who has the desire to do more, and to become a better person, to make himself more available as an instrument of God's grace.

> ....another one who on occasion has read the Lessons is a professor of chemistry in the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis. Can't you possibly recognize the fact that when we plan and purpose in this congregation, whatever it may be, it's in order to equip him in his relationship with the world, in his training young men who may have to make very, very critical decisions at some dritical period in the life of our nation, and in the life of the world.

Make no mistake about it, when we plan and we purpose in this congregation, we plan and purpose because we recognize that we have a responsibility to equip people by sharing with them the Word of God, by nurturing them on the Sacraments, by providing them Christian fellowship and instruction. Read it that way! That's exactly what this congregation is! That's what it's all about.

> ....I could go on and name other Lay Readers - - the man who in Pan-Lutheranism represents all of our colleges, a most significant level of cultural life today.....the man who when he reads, turns his back on this

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altar and on a Monday morning goes to Ft. Meade in the National Security Agency.....the young man who reads the Lessons who already has committed himself to prepare for the Ministry of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now take this strand of thought and apply it to your life - - the path that you take from this place when this hour is over. Your relationship with this parish, this congregation, says, must be the kind of thing that equips you to be become equipped, that you might witness effectively for Him. Don't talk overmuch about involvement. Any man who is anywhere is involved. It's only that you might have eyes to see the thing that needs to be done and the energy by which to equip yourself nobly in God's sight to do the thing that needs to be done where you are with what you have.

Now in order to equip the saints I could tell you that this Book of Reports is also to be reflected in our concern for a particular place. A congregation that's gathered company needs a place where people gather, where it's made easier to think the thoughts of God. Look upon this building then, and look upon the Christian Education unit as a base for our operation.

You may recognize this as you read either what's written or between the lines, but there's evidence of good husbandry in this report. As an example, this is a modest place in which we meet. By the standards known by other congregations our size, many congregations have buildings twice as large as this. But as an evidence of good husbandry, we ask our staff to provide us with multiple services, using the room over and over again on any given day rather than spending hundreds of thousands of dollars for a larger place to accommodate all of our people in a more commodious way and perhaps in one seating.

There's evidence of good husbandry in our concern when we purchased Bethany.

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It will soon be ten years. For less than we paid the Parish Deaconess in her housing allowance we're able to maintain an entire house that's used in the program of the parish, to say nothing of the utilization of the space around the property for parking. With the expenditure of dollars there is the exceedingly precious evidence of good husgandry. A place is necessary. Thanks to our Committee on Church Property, it's kept in good repair.

I could talk to you as you read this Book of Reports about the fact that here is reflected our concern for personnel. You can't have a program without staff. I wish you were privy to the information that sometimes I must share with the Committee on Staff. Right now our particular concern: somewhere we believe that in God's great and good world there is someone that God intends for us, to lead us in our ministry to youth - - in order to equip them as saints, in their ministry to today'swworld. What kind of person ought he be? This question is being answered as the Committee on Staff says, what is it that we want to have him do? What kind of person ought he to be? We are idealistic. We're looking for the best possible person.....600 precious young people, the size of a good many congregations of the Washington District and the Lutheran Church of the Maryland Synod. We have responsibility for them. We are idealistic - - what kind of person ought he to be? The kind of person who knows every one of them by name. He ought to be the kind of a person who is able to establish a ministry to those who are on the periphery, to create new ways to keep their interest.

Pastor Naegele and I, before he left, soberly reflected upon the fact that by the time a youngster in this parish is in the 12th grade, less than 60% of those youngsters have an active relationship with any aspect of our program. It's never enough to say this is the way it's always been. There isn't a pastor

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anywhere who doesn't decry the fact that once youngsters are confirmed they lose interest in the church, unhappily, in many cases, to take on the pattern of their parents.

...what kind of person are we looking for? So the Committee on Staff, in your behalf, meets time and again, and always prayerfully, as we contact synod president after synod president, trying to find the best possible person.

I could talk to you a bit about the program when a meeting is scheduled, when a committee is appointed - - what lies behind it? My cup overflows with joy when I tell you that one of the most significant things we've done in behalf of the youth of this parish we've done in the appointment of a Commission on Youth Ministry here in Saint Luke Church. They've already had one meeting. They have another meeting coming up this week. Half of the committee membership - - young folks under 18 years of age - - they're identifying. When I attended the meeting of the Executive Council of the Lutheran Church in America I knew a measure of gratification when we approved a statement that's to appear in the approved congregational constitutions, when more than six thousand parishes in the Lutheran Church in America will be doing on a church-wide level the kind of thing we've already done here. And why have we done it? Because we realize the responsibility to equip these young people as witnesses for Jesus Christ, in the world of which they are a part now.

The acid test of course is this: when a year ends, no matter now many printed pages you have in front of you, the question-of-questions might well resolve it: Has my life deepened spiritually in the past year? Is Jesus Christ any more real to me now than He was a year ago? Am I involved in the Lord's work any more now than I was a year ago? I do not dispute the fact that God

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can work outside His Church. Archbishop William Temple was absolutely right when he said that God has other things in which He's interested besides religion. It's God's work.

And Gustave Aulein was absolutely right when he said we're all in the hands of God, whether with our belief or unbelief. But also not to be ignored is the fact that God's preference is still through His Church.

Now this is what it's all about, my friends - - trying to better equip you. To this end we give our energy and consecrate our efforts. We're human, and we limp along, but don't forget the direction in which we're headed. It's thrilling. It's challenging. Ask anyone who is part of it!

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Septuagesima Sunday February 2, 1969

"GOD OF THE LOST"
- - Straying Sheep

It's been intended that each of these three Sundays before the First Sunday in Lent we might turn to the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. It's one of the most interesting and most beautiful of all pages in the Bible. The 15th chapter, the entire chapter, is a trilogy. It contains three stories that Jesus told as He reacted to a group of people, a particular group of people.....a particular group of people who were taking issue with Him because He happened to be the kind of person that He was, a person who loved people, a person who loved all kinds of people.

Some of us can love lovely people - - it's easy to love certain kinds of people. But to love the unlovely, to like the unlikeable, and to see promise in the unpromising - - that's something entirely different. But Jesus Christ happened to be that kind of person, who loved all kinds of people.

Now there was a group of people who were taking issue with Him because He happened to be that kind of person. They couldn't quite accept the fact that He could like a particular kind of person....they were the disadvantaged, they were the deprived....they were the hurt people of life. They were the lost.

It was one thing for Jesus Christ to meet them on the way and to give them the time of the day - - but on occasion, if you please, He even sat down and ate with them -- that meant establishing a kind of identification. And this was about the last straw that they could take, so they began complaining...

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...every time they got together in the little groups they would tear Him to shreds, what they seemed always to end up with was because He happened to be the kind of person that He was! - - someone who loved people, all kinds of people.

For our purpose this morning, let me read you just the first sever verses of this 15th chapter. You pay yourself a beautiful tribute if it could be perchance the section in your Bible that's the best-thumbed, the one to which you keep going back again and again:

> "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.
> And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.
>
> (And one translation at this point says, "So he told them a story" This translation says, And he spake this parable unto them)
>
> And he spake this parable unto them, saying,
> What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?
> And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.
> And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.
> I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."

I know you full well, my friends. You'd squirm a bit if you had to associate with the kind of people that Jesus Christ chose freely to associate with....

...I'm not so sure that you'd want your youngsters to run around with their youngsters.....some of you would put up a mild

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protest if they moved into your neighborhood....

...as fine as I believe this congregation to be, some of you would squirm a bit if they became members of this congregation .....and it might take a bit of doing to see that her circle leader accepts any one of them....

Knowing human nature as you do, as I do, this was the kind of people for whom Jesus Christ went out of His way, to make sure that they knew that His kind of love was the kind of love big enough, and strong enough, and kind enough, and thoughtful enough, to include them.

I ask myself sometimes the question: Why did they get that way? - - these people on the sidetrack of life, because that's what they were, they weren't on the main track of life.....they weren't caught up in mid-stream, they weren't moving along graciously and nobly towards some great objective. They were off to the side. You can use any number of figures of speech for them, but for our purpose, in good Christian tradition, they were lost. Somehow they had become lost, they had become estranged and separated from what they were meant to become. And when you become lost you become shy and frightened. It does something to you to become lost.

My older sister, a downright lovely girl, who has a heart about as big as God ever put into any woman, has never known the good fortune to have children of her own. So very naturally she goes out of her way to shower all kinds of affection upon our nieces and nephews. She and her husband have a little place in the mountains, and one time she thought, what a delightful thing to take these youngsters up into the hill country. I think she must have had a perfectly wonderful day planned. And as one of their experiences she had scheduled for them a trek through the woods. So off they went with

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Helen.

For some unexplainable reason they became lost. Hour after hour passed, and then the threat of darkness settled in. Being a very wise person as well as being a very good person, she knew that they could not become aware of her panic....but then they were found. A horrifying experience. And I suppose she had quite a problem on her hand when she helped to tuck them into bed that night, to assure them that she could still be trusted, that this kind of thing might not happen again....and how the day ended, you see, so differently from the way she had planned it. Presumably she had thought, when we get back we'll build a fire, and then we'll have our supper...and they'll eat like mad because of the appetites they've built up as they were going through the mountain. And then being a keen student of human nature, I suppose she would have been pleased to have had a kind of garnering of the thoughts of the day, to have one youngster remark about this peculiar kind of moss that she had discovered....or perchance to talk about the strange sound of strange animals. But it didn't turn out that way. They just settled back at the lodge -- horrified -- terribly frightened and uneasy. They had been lost.

I've lived long enough to believe that that's a parable of life. Many of us set out, early, and set for ourselves noble expectations. We have grand and wonderful dreams how it's all going to come out. But somewhere along the line, for this reason or for that reason, we become lost, side-tracked, and it just doesn't come out. The thing does something to us. We become the hurt people, frightened and timid.

Oh, I know full well that people become lost sometimes because of their own stupidity. I'm fully aware of that. God knows what a close reading of my

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own life provides testimony enough on that score, and I dare say yours as well. We came to a turn in the road - - there were two paths to be taken, and very foolishly we knew what path we took, and deliberately so.

Sometimes people become lost along the highway of life because the circumstances are such that they're pushed off to the side and they're crowded. They just aren't equal to the forces of the pressures. The other things are far too great, and so they're just pushed and herded to the side. And for a while they're lost.

Is there any word to be spoken to people like that? Are we just to accept it as a fact of life that the hurt are to remain hurt, and the lost are to remain lost? Is there to be no concern for those whose lives have not fared out as well as they had hoped and dreamed? Is God to be understood as being completely impervious to such conditions and circumstances?

With whatever sensitivity God gives me, I look at human nature today, people of all ages, and I discover how they become lost - - the lost generation is any generation.....

> ....just teenagers who are a bit confused and bewildered at a certain stage along the journey in life, and get off to the side of the road temporarily, and through our standards are not all that they ought to be...
>
> ....this can happen to adults, middle-aged folks, even folks facing the sunset slope.....

....at any point along the journey of life a man runs the risk of becoming lost, either because of his own stupidity or because the pressures of life are so great. Is there any word from God to people like that?

If I understand the Christian Gospel aright, that's the word, that is the

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only word - -

For God so loved, that He gave His Son to be the
Seeker-after-the-lost.....to get the word across
to the hurt -- You can get back, that you're meant
to be found, that your dream can be established.....

...I don't know what you make of it, but if this isn't enough to put joy into the heart of any man who claims the name of Christ I don't know what is. For every single one of us runs the risk of becoming lost, and there's always the seeking Christ, calling us back.

Let me tell you again that precious story that Joseph Forte Newton used to tell about some youngsters who were taken captive by a tribe of Indians... ...and the men were killed, the youngsters were allowed to grow. They were brought up as Indians. Some of the women escaped, and there was one woman in particular who had a noble dream that one day she might be able to retrieve her child.

As fate would have it, a commanding force of our soldiers came into that area and took over the wandering Indian tribe. They passed the word along that here were some people who were not quite Indian.....you can imagine what this did to this woman's heart. She went,hoping that perhaps this could be her child. But the years had passed - - how could she be sure? What identification could be established? How could she know? The commanding officer said, "There's one thing yet to be tried - - was there anything that you ever sang to him in the days of his childhood? Was there ever a lullaby by which you put him to sleep at night?"

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...she went walking down in front of those who had been retrieved from the Indian tribe....she softly sang the lullaby of years gone by.....and then, one of them came forward and sang with her the words that finished the stanza of that lullaby.....

God is the great singer of the Song of Salvation which He has implanted in our hearts. Be poetic enough, be dreamer enough to picture God as the great seeker singing the song.....and then one day some of us who have been lost recognize the song and the Singer, and we are found all over again.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Anniversary Service - Messiah's Centennial
South Williamsport, Pennsylvania February 9, 1969

O GOD, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Who is the great King and Head of the Church,
accept our gratitude for this day, and for
every day of the past hundred years, and the
way you have watched over your Church through-
out the world; and now particularly for that
part of the Kingdom which is Messiah's Church.
Bless her richly in this hour, her Pastor and
her people, that they may effectively witness,
in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

First let me speak a word to you in behalf of the congregation that I am privileged to serve in Silver Spring, Maryland. As I entered the church this morning, this was the message that was handed to me, evidently called in before our arrival here today:

"Please extend on our behalf warm-felt congratulations on the observance of the 100th anniversary of Messiah's Lutheran Church. Prayers are being offered at our services this morning for the continued ministry of Messiah's. Saint Luke Lutheran Church, Silver Spring, Maryland."

And now, if you please, my personal word to you.

When Lisa Tierman - - some of you affectionately referred to her as "Grosmutter" - - the Estonian who lived with us in the Parsonage while we were here, first came to us from Europe, even in her mid-70's she was unable to speak a single word of English - - she came devoutly to this place, Messiah's Church. She found her seat in the Nora Bannen Bible Class, she received the Sacrament. Sometimes people were troubled because she didn't say anything to them. She didn't say anything because she couldn't speak English. But we remember how one day, was it six weeks after she had been with us in the Parsonage? - as

she got up from the table, in broken English she said, "Thank you." Surely in God's sight there are no more precious words, aside from the cry for pardon, than thankfulness. I would be ungrateful indeed if I did not express to you, as I return to this place, the gratitude of my heart.

Oh, don't misunderstand me, I am exercising considerable restraint, for this dare not be for me, nor for my family, a sentimental journey, but rather if it's pleasing to God, as a pilgrimage of gratitude. For it was this congregation that first taught me what a wonderful thing it is to be a pastor, the shepherd of people of God . . .

. . . it was this congregation that first sat me down at the feet of that venerable soul, the Rev. Dr. Robert Griffin Bannen...

. . . it was in this congregation that Winifred and I exchanged our vows, you set us on our way with your prayers...

. . . it was in this congregation that our two sons were named for Jesus Christ...

. . . it was in this congregation that one of our sons was confirmed in the Christian faith....

...our debt is great. And to the day that I die, as God gives me any sense of memory at all, my words will be "thank you."

Pastor, and members of the Committee, you are kind and gracious in inviting me to return for this occasion. It must have been a great moment, a hundred years ago, when the Rev. J. G. Griffith led that tiny band of people into their first church home. For more than a year, you see, they had met in borrowed places. Most of us know what it is to want something that we can call our very own. It's one thing to be indebted to people because they make their

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facilities available to us, but to be able to call a church building your very own! - - it's a great moment in the life of any people.

Somewhat different from today, however. Undoubtedly from the very first day that Messiah Church was organized there were those who worked and planned for the day when they could have a building of their very own. But contrary to the mood and temper of today - - did you know this - - that in a good many places, when a congregation is organized, there are those who keep asking themselves: Ought we to have a church building? Should we invest our time and our energy in gathering funds for brick, and mortar, and stained glass, and costly pipe organs? My friend Ed Steimle whook the whole Lutheran Church in America up quite a bit, when at Kansas City, at the Convention of the Church a few years ago, he suggested that the first thing that a congregation ought to think about when it organized is not a place, but a purpose! - and before they even take title to a site on which they want to put their first building, they ought to say, What is the need in this community that exists, that as a congregation we can meet? If Messiah Church were being organized today, it could be that the pressure of the times would dictate that one of the last things that they might think about would be a building.

In Burlington, Vermont, there's a congregation of the First Presbyterian Church, organized about ten years ago. One of the first things they did was to buy a piece of ground, and then to have erected on it a sign that said,

"Site of the Future First Presbyterian Church,
Burlington, Vermont."

Thanks to the mood and the temper of the day, figuratively if not literally, they've crossed out that sign, and they superimposed upon it these words:

"Should this Church Building be Constructed?"

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...and there are those who are bringing pressure upon that congregation to go on meeting as a little band of people in their homes, and concentrating upon a specialized ministry for this day, completely independent of a church building.

So when I stand before you now, invited to share with you the occasion that marks the entrance of a congregation into its church building for the first time, what is there that I can say?

Well I know full well that they were pleased and proud as punch to have a building of their very own, and how wisely they must have built. Throughout Williamsport in those days, one can just drive around the city and see what sturdy and magnificent structures...

...First Baptist Church as an example - - and an excellent piece of workmanship, that becomes the mighty fortress which we say the Church is....

...Trinity Episcopal, Christ Episcopal, The Church of the Ascension - - how well they built, that they might have a place...

With whatever gift of a sanctified imagination God would allow us, I would propose now that you picture having in your hand the Order that they followed the day they dedicated, the day they entered that first unit. What, now, I ask you, would be the most important part of that Order for Worship?

- -Some of you might say the Invocation, in which they ask God's blessing upon that day in that place - -

- - some of you might say, why the Dedicatory Prayer, of course, in which this building was set aside to the Glory of God - -

If you were to press me, I'd suggest the Benediction, because once the Bene-

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diction is pronounced, it's as much as to say to the congregation:

"Well, get with it now! Get beyond these
walls, and live in the name of Jesus Christ, out in the world!"

The highly esteemed Dwight F. Putman, now the President Emeritus of the Central Pennsylvania Synod, by virtue of his Office used to go around the Synod to dedicate and re-dedicate structures. He listened very politely, and very earnestly, as the pastor and the committee pointed out the fine details of the costly edifice. Then it came time to preach the sermon. Like as not, he'd stand there at the sacred desk and he'd make much of the fine facility in which he was found...

...only to drive home the point that this thing is not an end in itself!

Poor indeed is any pastor who sees the dedication or re-dedication of his church as something that equates completely with the Kingdom of God. I can't begin to tell you what joy Winifred and I know when we can worship in a place as beautiful - - if I allowed myself for a moment to become all too human, I'd be envious, and wish that we would have had those fourteen-and-more-years ago, what a place of beauty. Yet Dr. Putman would say, this place is not an end in itself! The important thing is what happens after you turn your back on this place!

That's why I'm constrained now to bring you to the text, the last verse of the Gospel according to Mark:

"And they went forth, and preached every where,
the Lord working with them - - "

There are four words that I'd like to put before you now...When we understand what the Church really is. In Catechetical Class we throw the youngsters for a loop sometimes when we ask, what is the Church? And invariably they begin

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with the building. You and I dare not make that mistake. Whenever you think of the Church there are four words that ought to loom immediately upon the horizon of your thoughts - -

One, the Church is the body of people who are the Called.

> ...that word ecclesia, for church, means "called out." That's what the Church is. It's made up of people who have responded to the call of God, who have known the claim of God's love in Jesus Christ upon their lives...

You've got to begin at that point. Every single one of us here, properly understood, is somebody who has been called, and we have this thing in common. Please bear with me for a moment. Two weeks ago today, in the year 1956, I preached in Saint Luke Lutheran Church in Silver Spring, Maryland for the first time. It was a traumatic experience.....a minister to a group of strangers...

> ...here in Messiah's Church there was that accumulation of house numbers, and middle names, and telephone numbers....
>
> ...366 Market Street...541 Market Street....1109 High Street...
>
> ...99 Parkwood Place...4944...20766....Mabel Cornelius
>
> ....William Tripp Reed
>
> ...the most useless bit of information I took to Silver Spring, Maryland - - an accumulation of telephone numbers, and street numbers, and even middle names.....

...but to find myself standing among a group of people that I was now, by the grace of God to shepherd.....

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There were three morning services.

It was only at the conclusion of the first service, when I was overwhelmed by this while shaking hands with people at the door, that I re-gained my sense of balance. Here they were going out - - I knew nothing about these people - - - where they lived, where they had come from, their mood, their temperament, their personality.....and these things you must know if you're to be a shepherd. ...when suddenly it occurred to me, as I was shaking hands after the 9:30 service, the people were going by - - I heard the echo of my own voice, mentally, as I shook hands I said to myself, 'I don't know you, I don't know where you live, I don't know where you've come from, I don't know where you're going, I don't know the deep need of your soul - - but I know one thing: you're somebody God loves --- every single one of you -- an object of God's love.'

What a transformation would take place in any group of Christians whenever they meet if when they find themselves gathered together, even though they may not know the people in front of them, behind them, or alongside of them, if they could say of the Church, We are the company of the Loved - - God loves me, no less, no more, than the person in front of me, or alongside of me, but God loves me! This is what the Church is - - made up of people who are called by God's love.

The second thing is, the Church is the company of the Gathered.

There is no such thing as a solitary Christian. You can profess the name of Jesus Christ and go off by yourself - - whenever any man has something in common with somebody else he's naturally drawn to that person. So Messiah Church will always be the company of the gathered. Martin Luther was absolutely right in his understanding of the Apostles' Creed when he explains the Church as "those

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who are being drawn together, gathered, enlightened, by the Holy Spirit."

And the third word to be said, when you think of the Church, they are the ones who are being nurtured, the body of people who are being fed and sustained by the Word of God, the proclamation of the Gospel from the sacred desk, the reception of the Sacraments from the altar.

A man cannot live without love, man cannot live without the love of God. Oh, Pastor, I wish you could have known him - - Dr. Bannen indelibly marked upon the fabric of my mind that if a pastor is to be anything, he must be someone who keeps talking about the love of God, and then exemplifying in front of people that love. He had a heart as big as the world. And while Messiah Church during his latter years may have lacked many things, a lovely edifice and a good program, and even staff.....but when that man walked among us, he walked as the personification of God's-latest-word-to-His-people. And just to be in church where Dr. Bannen was was to be sustained by an undying love of God echoed and reflected in that man's life.

A man cannot live without the Sacraments, so in and through the Church we are nurtured, we are equipped, to become saints. Who are saints? They're God's agents, human beings through whom the love of God is channeled.

Now one final word....CALLED...GATHERED....NURTURED...

...SCATTERED...

You were never meant to stay in this place. You were meant to receive the Benediction, and it's simply a dignified way of saying:

"Get on the way, now - - get going! - - get away
from this, and go out into the world, and preach...
teach...and live!"

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I think it was during the '46 flood that caused so much havoc in Williamsport - - I can't begin to recite for you the damage that was done to certain churches, but I do remember in particular First Presbyterian, because of its particular location - - the great damage that was done, to the pews, to the basement, in Sunday School rooms, their main auditorium...nave...sanctuary, call it what you will. It was closed for a number of weeks until it could be fully repaired. But I remember one day going down there at 3rd and Mulberry, seeing the sign on the church bulletin board. They tell me Jessie Bell was responsible for it - - the sign read something like this:

> "First Presbyterian Church is temporarily closed. That means this building is closed, due to repairs that are being made. But the real First Presbyterian Church is very much in operation. You'll find it scattered throughout the city of Williamsport...Wherever its members are to be found, in their homes, in the shops, on the streets, in the offices, in the market-place -- and witnessing for Jesus Christ."

So on this occasion you ask me how properly to recall this day that deals with the entrance into the first church building, the incipient stage that has led to something as wonderful and glorious as your complex today? I would remind you that the true Church is gathered only in order to scatter. The effectiveness of the ministry of this congregation in its second century may have this place as a base, but only as a base. It's pleasing in God's sight that you should re-construct as you've re-constructed. God loves beauty, and majesty, and grandeur. But there's one thing that He loves more, the humble and a contrite heart that loses itself in ministering love.

They used to tell the story of a man who went to a South Sea island, presumably to be the first missionary in the name of Jesus Christ. It was common knowledge that no one had ever gone there in the name of Christ before. The

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missionary went about telling people about Jesus Christ.

And as he told those people, presumably for the first time about Jesus Christ, the people had a look of recognition on their faces, and they said, "We know it! We know exactly the person of whom you speak. He used to live on this island!"

> ...and the missionary said, "You're mistaken. Jesus Christ was born thousands of miles away from here, in Bethlehem, not here."

They said, "But he used to live here - - everything you said about that man was true for the man that comes to our mind."

The upshot of the whole matter was that years before, that a missionary had been commissioned to go out, to a certain other island, but he was shipwrecked and he never made it there. And being stranded, he lived out his remaining years upon this island, with no communication whatsoever with the Mission Board, and they presumed that he was dead.....but he lived out the days of his years on that island there among those people....he was to them as Jesus Christ.

> - - and that's what the Church is - - to be to the world -- beyond these doors -- as Jesus Christ.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Quinquagesima Sunday February 16, 1969

"GOD OF THE LOST"
(Luke 15)

It was the other Tuesday in the 8th grade catechetical class when I made bold to offer the suggestion that each member of the class, with a sanctified imagination, try to picture his reaction to Jesus Christ had He been about to walk into our catechetical classroom session - - "Try to picture yourself, now, in the presence of Jesus Christ - just how would you feel? What would be precisely your reaction?"

It's a good discipline to allow yourself to become encountered by Jesus Christ, because this, we say, is what the Christian religion is all about, allowing ourselves to be found encountered by Christ. And a man has no such thing as Christian experience unless he can say that he has been encountered by Christ. An encounter precedes reaction. This is where I pressed hard - - "Come now, what would be your reaction if Jesus Christ were looking at you?"

The answers were not long in coming. Bless their souls, of all the answers that were given, two towered above all the others.....

...one: "I think I would feel that Jesus Christ was very much interested in me, that He would understand me, that He would make me believe that He loved me . . " - - unashamedly the answer came in much that way. Significantly enough, the other answer was this, that towered above all the others:

"I think I would be very uncomfortable -- just the way He would look at me would make me feel as though He was demanding something from me."

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Both answers, you know, are absolutely correct. Because when we've had our moments, when we have been confronted by Jesus Christ, that's the way we found Him to be, or else we haven't had an experience....someone who looks us straight in the eye, to use a figure of speech, and permits us to believe that He's definitely, personally interested in us, that He cares, that He loves us.....and at the same time, someone who could be very demanding, and very exacting.

It's a salutary thing to try to see yourself from God's point of view. Occasionally I sit down in my study and I try to evaluate the Christian religion as one religion among many religions. You know, of course, that it's not the only religion in the world. What do all these religions have in common? - -

...they've all had a great teacher

...they've all had some standard of morality

...they've all had a pronouncement of a way of life

...they've all had a distinctive personality

- - Christianity has these things in common with all the religions of the world. Yet what is distinctive about the Christian religion? - - what is unique?

The answer of course comes quickly: Jesus Christ. The other religions do not have Jesus Christ. And you and I have properly been taught, and so we believe, as the Apostle Paul put it, that "In Jesus Christ all the fullness of God has been pleased to dwell." If you want to 'unglue' that a bit, it might come out like this: Jesus Christ is God's own thing -- completely -- deliberately -- all that God is, Jesus Christ is.

Now how did Jesus Christ conceive of His mission in life? What was Jesus Christ from Jesus Christ's point of view? He spelled it out for us: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost."

Now you can tie these two threads together -- what our 8th-grade catechetical class youngsters think of Jesus Christ, and what Jesus Christ thinks of Himself. Jesus Christ says, "I am coming to you, personally, because I love you....and I will be very demanding when I find you in your situation, and if it's not to my liking and if it's not for what you were meant, then I'll find you a way out of it - - " I think you can put it that way. Now, very quickly, how do we appear from God's point of view? The answer is given in the words of Jesus Christ: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost" - - - from God's point of view you and I are lost.

It was intended that these three Sundays before Lent (last Sunday there was an interruption on my part), that these three Sundays should be given to the consideration of that magnificent 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, which is a series of three stories that Jesus Christ told -- illustrative of the fact that He came to seek and to save whatever is lost. In those stories He tells about a woman who had a coin that she lost....and she kept looking for it until she found it - - - about a man who was a shepherd and had a hundred sheep,.....and one of them was lost, and he went looking for the lost sheep until he found it.....

- - and then very poignantly He told the story about a man who had two sons, and one of them went astray....and the father's heart was always searching and seeking in order that the son might be saved. Jesus Christ says: This is what God's like -- like an old man running down the road...as an expression of the fact that He was forever longing for what was lost. Jesus

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Christ says this is what we're like, we're like anything that's lost. And when does a thing become lost? Whenever it's no longer in its proper relationship, whenever it isn't where it belongs.

When God made us, God made us with a freedom of will. And whenever you give a man a situation in which he can make up his own mind, frail human creature that he is, you're going to run the risk of his doing a very stupid or foolish thing, or committing a very willful error. God, knowing all of this then, you see, set up a home for us, a place for which we were ultimately to head. He called it Heaven -- "This is your destination." Then along the route, the pilgrimage which is life itself, He's raised up directional signs, the Ten Commandments as such -- "This way! This way! -- not that way -- This way!"

And then out of His great love for us, because we become tired and weary along the way, He's established resting places. And when a man begins to rest he regains his composure, and gathers anew a measure of strength that he might continue the journey. I like to think of this place in many different ways, and one way by which I think of this House of God -- as a resting place, where we come and we're empowered all over again to continue the journey, that we might not become lost in our weariness, and in our bewilderment.

I like to think of this as a base of operation along the road, that you and I come here again and again that we might get our bearings, that we might get our true orientation. We can get all fouled up in life, it's so easy. It's surprising how lost we can become on a Monday morning, and remain lost until a Saturday.....and then God gives us a Sunday and God gives the chance to gather as His people in His House, and here, when you and I come here, turns us around all over again, and says, "You're meant for Eternal Life."

If I were not a preacher, I would hope that I would want to remember as

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one who was baptized and confirmed that I was "put on the road".....when I was confirmed, I'd want to remember that I was established "in the way"....and then every now and then I'd have to come back to God's House to get my directions all over again. And I think that's what happens here every Sunday morning. For shame upon us if it doesn't, because, this I must say to you very quickly - - every single one of us is lost. Even when you read that section in the 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Like, when He talks about 99 sheep that were not lost -- that's not a true reading of life. No one of us keeps faithfully to the way.

Oh, in this 15th chapter you'll find the reasons why people become lost, and the reasons are many....

...sometimes people become lost in the way through their folly and their stupidity. For no reason at all they take the wrong road, and get lost....

...then there are some people who get pushed off the road by the subtle pressures, the pressures of frustration...they can't quite handle an immediate situation, and life bears down on them at that point....it might be a concern for a teenager....it might be a concern for their status and their work....it might be the recognition of the fact that they can't quite travel the road as fast as once they could.....it might be that they're beset by a suspicious mind, an unwillingness to believe what the sign really says.....these are subtle pressures that push people aside, get them off the road.

In the years that God has given me as a Pastor, I've seen this happen every now and then in the lives of people who are members of a church, where the subtle pressures are at work, and they shunt them off to the side, for the time being they're lost, because they're out of relationship.

All of us can become lost. One of the treasured moments in my ministry was

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a preacher's daughter coming to me, five years out of college, and after she had become married, and she said, "Pastor, I can't begin to tell you the joy that I know in my heart - - " (these were her words) - - "in finding myself now back in a proper relationship with God's People, and in the Church, and with my Saviour Jesus Christ."

It isn't enough that I should belabor the point that you and I are prone to become lost. It's simply the recognition of the fact that this could happen to us! In one of these stories that Jesus told there is the younger son who is in the far country who had become lost....and the great moment arrives when he says to himself something, and admits that he's lost. There comes a time in every man's life when he needs to sit down and do nothing but talk to himself. And when that happens he has to be careful what he tells himself, because you and I have a very wicked way of sometimes telling ourselves things that are not true.....like a person beholding himself in the mirror....

> ...the thinning hair, but he still says to himself, morning after morning as he grooms, it's not quite as thin as his wife says it is!
>
> ...and the woman who readies herself to go out and face the world, and she'll get a furtive glance as she sits before the mirror.....maybe she's not really as beautiful as she allows herself to believe that she is!

....when a man sits down and stares himself straight in the eye and talks to himself, he has to be very careful what he says because he has a way of believing his own words. To the everlasting credit of the boy that was lost in the

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far country, he admitted that he wasn't where he belonged, and he said, "I'll go back home." And the great and precious thing about it is that all the time he was lost there was someone longing for his return. This is what God's like - - - in an undiscouragable way, He's always calling us - -

"Come back! - - Come back!"

Read carefully that 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. In every instance it's established that he kept looking, until he found it. If time permitted, and I wouldn't run the risk, I could make much of the fact that man's plight is miserable. But that's not the point at which to begin. The point at which to begin is that God is a God of love, seeking and saving and rescuing love, - - and this is what the Church of Jesus Christ is, it's the expression of God's rescue mission.

Are you on the lookout for anybody who's lost? You're really not God's unless you are. But the thing you've got to remember is, that when you find somebody that's lost, you've got to make him feel at home. And for some people that's not very easy. But when the story was told, from God's point of view, even the angels in Heaven rejoiced, because somebody was found that was lost. Herein lies the hope that you and I should cherish.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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R.S.

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Palm Sunday March 30, 1969

"PILGRIMAGE OF THE SOUL"

THE STORY, O GOD, we have heard before. We remember it from the days of our childhood. Yet we so easily forget. Grant, now, on this day and in this place, we may study it anew and receive some fresh insight. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The text on this Palm Sunday is recorded as a portion of the 51st verse of the 9th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke:

"And he - - (the reference of course is to Jesus Christ)

- - steadfastly set his face to Jerusalem."

When I first became your Pastor I was impressed by a number of different things. Not the least of course was the fact that here in this congregation I was able to meet certain families, who as family units gathered together in the name of the Lord, attended faithfully, and represented within their own family an excellent standard of Christian devotion and stewardship.

Among those families I remember one. They were here for a while, and then they moved from the community. He was with the Service. His business brought him back here one day, and then he emplaned at National Airport, hoping to arrive safely at Norfolk. He never arrived. There was an airplane crash - - his life was taken from him as suddenly as you blow out a candle.

...the new widow wrote me a letter. I cherish it.

I recall certain things that she said - -

"Now I'll have to begin a life all over again, Pastor, and I think I'll begin by trying to re-live some of the precious things that we knew as a family. I'm going to take a journey.....

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> ...I want to visit the place where he proposed to me, I want to go back to the church where we were married, I want to re-visit the place where our children were baptized....I'll include in my schedule some of the vacation spots that we enjoyed so much. In the taking of this journey perhaps I can re-kindle the flame. For up until when this thing happened, it's as though we were reaching for the stars - - we had everything."

Fortunate indeed is that man who can take a sentimental journey. And if that expression is offensive to you and you shy away from it, then refer to it very properly as the 'pilgrimage of the soul' in which you go back to certain times and certain places, where you can hold on to something all over again, and be sustained and encouraged.

In this critical period of our history, the Church calls us during Holy Week to go back and make the journey with Jesus Christ, the journey He made in and through Jerusalem to Calvary's brow. And as we travel with Him perhaps we'll find the eternal verities anew which we can claim. It's amazing, of course, how the world has a way of remembering certain people, certain places, certain events, and the very recollection of these things can hold us in good stead. Yesterday, by deliberate design some of us stayed in the living room and viewed what was being shown us on television. One of the networks very fortunately had immediately available a recapitulation of certain events in the life of Dwight David Eisenhower. They were making much of his sentimental journey, his return to Europe after World War II.

The interviewer had gone along, and as they were visiting certain places he asked certain questions....for the moment they zero in on that certain room where the decision was made to invade Europe. The interviewer asked the questions, of

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course, that you and I would want to have asked - -

"Who are the people who were present?"

...and General Eisenhower replied and told about the people who were there....

"Well, what happened in this room?"

...then he detailed for us very briefly, how they were briefed, how the reports were brought in, the information they received....

Then of course the question was asked - -

"What about the making of the decision on D-Day?"

...and he said a little bit about that.

Then the implication was:

"How long did it take you to make up your mind?"

...and General Eisenhower said, "Well - -

...with that marvelous smile that was characteristic of that good man....."Some people thought it was an eternity -- - - they said five minutes - - maybe five minutes was like an eternity to them, but as I remember it," said the General, "It was only about 35 - 40 - or 45 seconds - - it was less than a minute - - - "

...to make up his mind! -- a decision that affected millions of people and directed the course of the future - - !

One more question you would have asked.

The interviewer put it to him: "What was going through your mind in that interval that seemed like an eternity?"

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...the General said, "The alternatives."

Precisely, my friends.

Behind any decision that's made is always the reckoning of the options and the alternatives. You judge a man's character, then, not simply by the decision that he makes but by a consideration of the options and the alternatives that he rejects. On this Palm Sunday we recall the most gracious act in history - - the decision that Jesus Christ made to invade Jerusalem, to make His triumphant entry. In order to fully appreciate the magnitude and the majesty of that decision, reckon for a moment with the alternatives. He had His options! - and they were very live ones.

Reports had come back to Him that His preaching was getting Him into trouble. There were those who were being offended, and being offended they were being polarized into groups, and He had His enemies.

Now He knew full well that He had come from God, to do the things of God, to preach the things of God, to teach the things of God. He wanted to do it authoritatively....

> ...He might have said to Himself, "On the basis of the reports that are coming to me, if my preaching is being offensive to some people, I'll modify my preaching, I'll skirt the issues.... ...instead of proclaiming truth, and pointing the finger which comes as condemnation, I'll deal in generalities - - I'll so preach that nobody can get mad at me _ _ "
>
> ...not easily done, of course, but some people try it.
>
> That could have been an option for Him.
>
> ...or He might have said, "In addition to skirting the issues, I'll also skirt the city. Jerusalem is the hot-bed. If I enter it, it's

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a place of confrontation, and the enemy is encamped and he has all of his resources. Because of their positions of authority, they might not follow after me, so I'll stay away from their territory".....a very live option. He could have chosen it, and He had the freedom of the will by which to do it, but He did not. He deliberately made up His mind that He would go to Jerusalem.

Now when you think of that act of courage, when you think of this moment of decision, reckon with at least two things.

One, it was a decision that He made voluntarily. Even when God gave us Jesus Christ, He didn't press a button so that Jesus Christ would, puppetlike, do the things that would please God. Jesus Christ had the freedom of will. He chose to do what He did that we might benefit by it - - that's why we love Him, that's why we follow Him. You don't become disciples of puppets.

The second thing that you have to reckon with in that moment of decision was, it was a very lonely moment. Some of us can be brave when we know we're going to be supported and sustained by our friends, but when you can't even count on your friends and you have to make the decision, that's something else. Jesus Christ made the decision knowing full well - - well, how does the Scripture put it? - - "One betrayed.....one denied.....they <u>all</u> forsook him and fled - - " In the moment when one decides to become courageous, it could be the loneliest moment in a man's life.

He made the decision. To Jerusalem He would go.

So we look back, and we're thrilled by it. Could it be that courage is the virtue that we most admire? The Christian Gospel talks a great deal about the Christian virtue called love, but we don't always want to be loving - honestly we

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don't. I know some people who enjoy hating people. That's a terrible thing to say! - - the only security they have is holding on to their prejudices. There are some people who just don't want to be loving, no matter how much Jesus Christ says we should! - - and knowing our frail human nature and stained by original sin, He even laid it down as a command! - - knowing that we might not always opt out for it: "This is my commandment, that you love."

Truth is a virtue. But I know some people who don't always want to be truthful. They say in this dog-eat-dog world of ours you have to be realistic and sometimes it's a matter of expediency to say and do something less than truthful.

But who wants to be a coward? We all admire the brave and courageous people, and we wish that we could be bold and brave, too.

Maybe it is the courage, maybe it is the virtue that most of us admire and respect. But be discriminating, my friend, some things that pass for courage are not really courage. Some people can be very bold and brave, and at the same time very reckless and irresponsible. Some of the youth of our land are doing some very brave and bold things, and they may allow themselves to believe that they're courageous....but they could end up by being very irresponsible, and very reckless. Some people appear to be bold and brave because theyre obstinate, they're self-willed, they won't budge. And without any careful concern as to what they're about to do they take their stand. Not so the courage of Jesus Christ! No mixing of motivation here. For the courage of Jesus Christ is complete surrender to God's will for His life.

Why do I bring it to your attention? That you might admire Jesus Christ as courageous? Not at all. Jesus Christ doesn't need your admiration. I bring it to

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your attention that you might recognize that in His complete surrender He was trusting God to break through, and to sustain Him, to support Him. That's the kind of courage that we need today - - the kind of courage that means my surrender to God's will in the sure and certain knowledge that God meets me, and supports me, and sustains me.

Did I not read the other day that at the National Bureau of Standards they devised an atomic clock that has a degree of accuracy, one part to ben billion.....which is simply to say that in a span of time of three million years the clock will not gain nor lose more than a single second! We have a terrific passion for perfection, a passion for perfection of a measuring of time. Maybe we ought to think in terms of establishing a perfection for the standards of eternity. Well here's one for you - - to emulate the pattern of the courage of Jesus Christ by which there's complete surrender to God's will, in the sure and certain knowledge that God breaks through and sustains you.

I have a notion, my friend, that there are many things that can be said about our relationship to God, but sometimes I believe that we're never nearer to Him than when we're courageous in His Name.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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The Easter Day Service as conducted in
Saint Luke Church on April 6, 1969

Whatever is can never be properly understood unless or until it is seen in the light of what might have been. There's no question about what is, as far as those of us who embrace the Christian faith are concerned. Jesus Christ is alive.

But before we celebrate this glorious truth in all its fullness, let's take a look at how it might have been. Hear, now, the reading of the final chapter of the Passion of our Blessed Lord:

> When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the sepulchre.
>
> Next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember how that imposter said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore order the sepulchre to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." So they went and made the sepulchre secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard."

Suppose this were the last thing that anybody could ever say about Jesus Christ: He died. They put Him in a grave, and they sealed it.

Down through the corridors of time there are the words that continue to hold us. Maybe you can hear them now: (the voice singing)

> "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"
> "Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?"
> "Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?"
> "Were you there when he rose up from the tomb?"

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There are, of course, to Easter, like everything else, two sides. We turn now to this side of Easter. Hear now the first Lesson.

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls. (I Peter 1:3-9)

...and the second Lesson:

> Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. So she ran, and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Peter then came out with the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. They both ran, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first; and stooping to look in, he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the napkin, which had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to their homes.
>
> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Saying this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

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> Jesus said to her, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." Mary Magdalene went and said to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.
>
> (John 20:1-18)

The text for the Good News, the sermon for this Day, is written as the 9th verse of the 6th chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans:

> "Christ being raised from the dead, will never die again. Death no longer has dominion over him."

In the play on the "Trial of Jesus" written some years ago by John Masefield, one of the last scenes takes place in the judgement hall of Pilate. The noisy crowds with their shouts of "Crucify him!" have all gone. Pilate himself is gone. Only Procula, Pilate's wife, remains.

...she stands gazing across the hills and the ~~vistages of~~ vales of Jerusalem, but she doesn't see them, but rather she focuses her eyes upon a hill outside a city gate which is called Golgotha, the place of the Skull. She sees against the darkened sky the still darker form of three crosses. As she stands there, Longinus, one of the soldiers who had crucified Jesus, comes in. Naturally she turns to him and she asks, "Is he dead yet?"

Longinus shakes his head and says, "No, my lady, he is not dead."

She questions, "But surely he is dead. He has been hanging there a long time now."

Longinus replies, "No, my lady, he is not dead. He is alive. His truth is let loose on the world now and neither Jew nor Roman can stop it."

This is what we've come to celebrate today - - and the word celebrate has been carefully chosen. For that's exactly what it is -- celebration. And in truth, every time Christians come together, and particularly on the first day of the

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week, they celebrate the tremendous truth that He lives!

It is never enough, my friend, to say that Jesus Christ arose. We must go on to say that He who arose lives. Jesus Christ was not the first to arise from the dead. Others before Him had done this very thing, or rather had this very thing done to them. And Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord, had been God's chosen instrument in having it accomplished...

> ...that man Jairus - - he had a daughter, and you may read the account for yourself, she was dead....and Jesus with the power of God and the compassion of God came, raised her from the dead, brought her back to life, from the dead to this life...
>
> ...there was a village called Nain -- the Scriptures have it -- and in that village there lived a woman who was a widow, who had an only son, and he died. The word was brought to Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ, in the power of God and in the compassion of God, brought the son back to life -- from the dead to this world!
>
> ...the most spectacular of all, of course, is recorded in the Fourth Gospel. One of Jesus' very precious friends, Lazarus by name, had been dead four days, and Jesus, in the power of God and the compassion of God brought Lazarus back from the grave.....

It is never enough to say that Jesus Christ arose from the dead. Others before Him had arisen from the dead, and in each instance, every single one of them had to face death again, for each one of them there had to come a time when they would die, and there was a funeral. But for Jesus Christ - - there's never been a funeral service for Jesus Christ....."Death hath no more dominion over him".....He who arose - - lives!

This is the blessed truth of the Christian Gospel.

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When I was a student at Gettysburg, I went once to visit the town cemetery, not the National Cemetery. I don't quite recall the occasion that took me there, but as I went from place to place in that cemetery I would read what had been written on the tombstones. Suddenly I came to a tombstone that meant something very special to me. It was the burial plot for one of the professors in the Seminary. I could gather the information from the headstone for myself. Dr. and Mrs. Wentz had had a son who died while he was still young. Dr. Wentz is a very learned man, perhaps the finest pedagogue that I've ever experienced -- a remarkable church historian -- a perceptive thinker. What, now, do you suppose would he choose to be carved into the stone that marks his family burial plot? - -

BECAUSE HE LIVES, YE TOO SHALL LIVE

...or as Jesus Christ said, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

This is the blessed truth of the Resurrection - - just as Jesus Christ arose from the dead, so the power of His Resurrection shall be made effective in our lives.

I'm not so sure that you and I always remember. Maybe we can become children of faith enough to accept the blessed truth that God could raise up Jesus from the dead.....but now to believe that that same God can make the power of the Resurrection life of Jesus Christ effective in mine - - I'm not so sure that you and I always believe.

For one thing, I'm certain we don't always live by it. We drag our feet, we hang our heads, we're given to despair, we become depressed and despondent creatures. If I were to characterize the generation of which you and I are part I'd have to say that we are a people characterized by meaninglessness, because on every side we seem to find the accent on the negative...futility...fear....

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...failure....frustration - - as though life were always saying: "No! No! No!"

...they tell me at the entrance-way to the Lutheran Church Center on 10th Street there hangs a banner. Banners are 'in' these days, you know. This one has been especially designed for this season of the year. It has on it only one word - - YES - - for Easter is God's eternal Yes to His created world....

...YES to life - - YES to love - - YES to hope.

"Alas for him who never sees
The stars shine through his cypress trees,
Who lingers not to see the break of day
Across the mournful marble's play;
Who has not learned in hours of pain,
The truth to sense in flash unknown,
That Life is ever Lord of Death "

...because He lives, we too shall live.

The Resurrection is something that happened in this world.

You'll make much of that, won't you? It took place, in the now. We who are so easily overcome by the forces of evil, tho think that Satan is going to have the last word, let's remember that the Resurrection did occur, and it did occur in our kind of world. God's eternal force is always at work.

Several months ago they macadamized the driveway at the new parsonage. It's about two inches of black-top. One of the first signs of spring -- would you believe it! -- this tiny strand of grass (I can easily tear it) - - penetrated its way through two inches of black-top! In a world that's overwhelmed by all that is black, still the force of good and truth can penetrate. This is something that you and I have to hold on to.

Thornton Wilder in his "Our Town" has the stage manager, there in Grover's Corner, New Hampshire, musing as he looks upon the town cemetery. He thinks of all the people he knows who are buried there. And then he says something like this: "But they're waiting for something....they're not waiting for us, they're

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not waiting for the things of this world, they're no longer attached to them. But they're waiting for the things eternal - - "

...for down deep in every man's heart there's a yearning for eternal things. And says the stage manager in Thornton Wilder's play, "Every now and then you and I have got to take these things out and look at them, and hold on to them." This is what the Easter truth does for us - - provides us with the eternal truth to which we were meant to cling, and by which alone we can be sustained in this evil and darkened world.

..."Death hath no more dominion over him - - "

- - He who arose - - He lives.

...but you and I have not always remembered it.

We've not always walked by its strength and by its power and by its peace. Maybe this is the moment, as related to the preaching of the Word, that we confess this fact to God. Now, as contemporary as this very hour, in the words of the Confession, let me use an old, old thought as we ask God to forgive us and to start us all over again on this Easter Day. Listen carefully to these words, because if they should be the echo of your own heart, you'll be asked to confess it by saying, "Yes."

> TO THEE, O God, Father of mercy and compassion, I confess with shame and sorrow that I am your unworthy child. I have sinned against You by the things I've thought, by the things I've said, by the things I've done. I've repelled Your great love, and I've spurned Your goodness. I have deliberately chosen and walked in my own way. I have rejected my precious heritage, I have been disloyal, careless, indifferent. I've served myself and I've forgotten you. I'm not worthy to be called Your child.
>
> But I do remember the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross. I do remember His glorious resurrection, His eternal victory over sin and death. By remembering these things, I make bold to come to you, and ask now that you forgive me, Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ, crucified, risen and glorious Lord, forgive my sins.

If this is your confession, declare it now by saying, "Yes."

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Beloved, hear the comfortable word of God.

> "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that who soever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Therefore the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Almighty, loving, ever merciful, grant unto you forgiveness of all your sins, time for amendment of life, and the grace and power of His Holy Spirit. AMEN.

Now, let's recite our faith, and particularly remembering today that there is that victorious element - - - He did arise!

I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried: He descended into hell; The third day he rose again from the dead - -

(interrupted by trumpets, and then the "Hallelujah Chorus")

(transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The First Sunday After Easter April 13, 1969

We've come back again, O God, to this place. And one of the reasons we've come back is that we need instruction in Your Word. Now as we share this sermon period we pray above all else that the Holy Spirit may guide and direct our thoughts, that something may be said that may hold us in good stead in the week which you have now given us. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

It could be that as you return to this place this day, you have thoughts of last Sunday's service. It really was something, when we came together hour after hour on Easter Day and celebrated -- a perfectly good word -- celebrated the glorious fact, the central truth of the Christian religion: Jesus Christ arose from the dead -- He lives!

And if perchance you might have reacted by thinking it was a bit too dramatic, let me beg you, don't let that bother you overmuch. For after all, the Resurrection is something worth shouting about. It's the most wonderful thing that ever happened, and you don't go whispering about the most wonderful things that happen to you. A wise man once said, "I'd ask God to forgive me if when I thought of the Resurrection I couldn't stand up and shout."

It was something to plan a so-called "unstructured service." We wanted to capture anew, as we said on the folder that you received, something of the spontaneity and the joy that should characterize a gathering of Christians. All too often, for shame upon us, we sing half-heartedly the great hymns of praise. In a very tired way we seem to sing our 'Alleluias' - - and that in itself is lamentable, honestly. For if you really want

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to know the truth, when the 'Alleluias' were first used, when Christians began to worship, they were a kind of a "Three cheers for God!" sort of thing, a kind of "hip - hip - hurrah!" kind of an affair....where people just had to react spontaneously, and to shout. That's how we got out 'alleluias'....and that's why even when the Gospel lesson is being announced, we stand up, and we respond - - it's supposed to be joyfully, and gratefully -- that God's Good News has happened! - - and it's happened for us! - - and it's coming anew to us on this day.

Will you permit a reflection or two on this day as we think of last Sunday's 'different' service. In the planning of that service, unstructured as we said it was, it was never intended that it would be anything less than a complete service, that is, all the basic ingredients would have to be included. You can't possibly worship unless there is the Act of Confession....

...the Declaration of Grace, that's made known to you that you are forgiven...

...there has to be the reading of the Word, and then some preaching upon the Word that's been read...

...opportunity must be given to the people to respond with heart and hand and voice, and so once you had made your confession and received the assurance of the forgiveness, you declared your faith....you brought your gift to the altar... ...we sang out hymns of praise.

The second reflection that you're entitled to know on this day, by way of observation, is that hopefully, with the air of spontaneity that would become the service, we'd earnestly pray that the thrust would come at a parti-

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cular point. As you recall the service, where do you think the thrust came, as far as you were concerned?

I cannot speak for you. I can only speak for those of us who were in on the planning of the service. The thrust was intended to come at the peak of the service, which was the moment of the Benediction. That's why we didn't encourage you to remain seated at the close of the service, but rather to stay standing, and with the sound of the 'Alleluias' ringing in your ears, to go out and face the world a-singing! - - geared for action.

It might be a healthy thing sometime, if maybe six or seven of us sat down on a Saturday, and we assumed the responsibility of planning a service of worship, anticipating the fact that you would be here on Sunday, and in your behalf we would structure what would become our corporate experience. What would we want as the impact? What would we design as the central thrust?

It was intended that once the Benediction was pronounced, that you would receive your marching orders - - you now would be let loose to go out into the world, and to live the faith you profess.

That leads me now to the text for today's sermon. It's presumably the closing verse of last chapter of the Gospel according to Mark:

> "And they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs that followed. Amen."

This is the way Mark concludes his reactions to the life, the teachings, the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The great and wonderful thing that happened -- God had invaded His earth, the incarnation was an established fact, the resurrection had taken place, the earth-shattering, the earth-shaking event had occurred. For every action there's reaction. This was intended to be the re-

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action of the Christians - - and so it was! -- that meditating upon the fact of the life, teachings and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christians got up and went -- moved out into the world -- told the Good News everywhere -- spread the Word.....and as they did so, God confirmed their deeds.

The Benediction, then, was meant to have the service peak at that point. Basically, I don't know how you look at the Christian religion, but basically, it's a 'go-go' affair, honestly it is! Christians were always meant to be geared for action. When our Blessed Lord returned prior to His Ascension, He found a group of Christians gathered together, and one of the first things He had to say to them - - - "Why do you stay here idle? - - get going! -- get with it! -- be on your way!"

Properly understood, that service last Sunday was to be something that would flow. You'll be pleased to know that there were a number of letters that came in the week, every single one of them speaking with appreciation for the service, its moving quality. One man who wrote, even before the sun set that day, talked about the way it happened to flow. We were pleased indeed that he could react that way, because this is the way we'd hoped people would react, that the service itself would flow and that we would flow out into the world as living witnesses of His truth, that we might keep the movement that the Benediction was meant to engender....."get with it! -- be on your way" ...

Dennis Duncan is the editor of an outstanding journal of news and comment known as the BRITISH WEEKLY. In an editorial that he wrote some weeks ago he said, "No matter what we may think, no matter what we may say, the Church is running down." It was his way of saying it's losing its momentum, it was his way of saying it's losing its spirit, it was his way of saying it's losing steam. I suppose this is one reason why some of us found it rather refreshing,

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different as it was, to have that group of young people come down from St. Paul's Church in Cumberland and put on that special service which they had designed, called, significantly enough: "The Winds of God" ...and the wind, properly understood, is something that moves -- it's alive! As fine a thing I suppose as could happen, so I am told, was a letter that was written by one of our own teenagers to the Director of Youth Work in St. Paul's Church, Cumberland, in which one of our girls said, "I found myself humming and singing the tunes all week long" - - the thing was still alive in her heart. Christian hymns were meant to be hummed and sung all day long.

Dennis Duncan says, the Christian Church is losing its glow, losing its movement, losing its vitality. You and I both know that the Christian Church has suffered a great deal in recent years from criticism, from friend and foe, from those inside, from those outside. Much of the criticism, it seems to me, sometimes, is the kind of criticism that's spoken by people who almost lose their perspective, when they become embittered and enangered.

On the other hand, one can always afford to listen to any voice that's critical. There are always lessons to be learned. What if the Church should be losing its spirit?

First, I would say to you that this is not a new criticism. In the last six months or so I've gone back to the books on the shelves of my study, and I've been pulling down this book and that book that was written thirty- thirty-five years ago. Occasionally I find something that's written there that's absolutely as relevant to today's world as though the man had written what's on the page of that book last evening. Is there any new thing under the sun? Is there any new word to be said, either for or against the Church?

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Dennis Duncan observed that the Church goes through a cycle. I think had he been here he would have been pleased with last Sunday's service and the spirit that characterized it. He said the first cycle, the first phase of the cycle of the Christian Church is that it's a movement. This is the kind of thing that's caught up in this text, that's why this text has been chosen....."And they went forth," - - theymmoved, they got up and they went

> ...that was the first characteristic of the Christian Church. It was not an organization, it was not an institution, it was not anything established. It was something that was being let loose. It was a group of people spirit-possessed. It was a group of people upon whom an idea had been laid.
>
> ...we talk about getting ideas, but basically ideas get us! We talk about getting the spirit-- that's not right -- it's the spirit that lays hold upon us!
>
> ...and when the Church was young, that's the way you could characterize the Church: a group of people upon whom the Spirit had fallen, and they were being propelled and motivated by a Power and by a Presence.

There are some of us who prey earnestly that this is the kind of thing that might characterize this congregation, that basically she might be understood as a fellowship in which something is alive, moving, going somewhere, and we're going with it!

The second phase in the cycle, according to Dennis Duncan, as I remember it, is that the Church became a kind of machine. That means an operating device, in which people became useful only as they could keep the maching going. The Church has always been criticized as being an institution. And any time

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anything becomes institutionalized it loses something. That's an established fact.

But also, institutions are a fact of life. You can't even run your tiny family circle without some kind of organization. Even when you have three people, something has to be organized if you're going to work at maximum benefit. You can't forever be going in three different directions. This is something we forget when we criticize institution and organization. If you want to accept the fact, it's a kind of necessary evil!

Some of us have nostalgia, and wish for the small group and the small segment, but that's no longer being realistic. We endeavor in this congregation to operate on the basis of a family principle - - and some of you know full well how irritating and difficult it can be to operate within a family circle!

It takes a bit of doing to keep a group as large as Saint Luke Church -- a thousand families! - - how can you keep a thousand families banded together without some sense of organization?

...two thousand members - - twelve years of age and older -- how can you keep them banded together without some kind of organization?

.....more than three thousand, including the children - - how can you keep them moving without some kind of organization?

I have the utmost patience with people who come to me who despair of organization and institution. I can fully understand their lament. And I've had my moments in my ministry when I could have turned my back upon the institutional church. But I stay with the institutional Church out of gratitude...

...it was the institutional Church that saw that I was baptized...

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....it was the institutional Church that saw that I was confirmed...

....it was the institutional Church that helped me get an education....

....and it was the institutional Church that guided me into the Ministry...

.....and it was in the institutional Church some of us as individuals are sustained, because we know the prayersthat ascend to Heaven through the institutional Church for the Lord's servants...

Some four, five, six years ago, a gentleman came to me, about to turn his back on the institutional Church, he wanted to go out on his own. And then he found that that wasn't quite possible. Then he turned his back on congregational structure.....and this very day as he is witnessing for Jesus Christ in his vocation, it's the institutional Church that gathers together at least $50,000, for a period of years, to maintain him in his base of operation.

But there's always the risk, that the institutional Church can lose its spirit and its fire, just as there's always a risk within a family circle that we can become so busy maintaining the family and the house and the residence that the fire of faith and love can grow dim.

You know the story, don't you? - - the Devil was once approached and said, "These Christians! - boy, they've got something! They're spirit-possessed! A great idea has gripped them - - look at the mighty movement of these Christians." And the Devil simply smiled and said, "I'll give them time. Just like anything else, the idea eventually becomes institutionalized, and then they'll lose something of their ardor, and their fire."

The third part of the cycle: you pass from a movement to a machine, to a monument. And there are those who tell us that that's exactly where the

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Christian Church is today..A replica of something worthwhile in days gone by. And there are some prophets who tell us that within twenty years we no longer will know the Church as you and I know it today - - the change is going to be that rapid -- so they prophesy.

I'd like to propose for you a strange notion - - that of necessity we may pass through all three of these phases, and yet retain something essentially worthwhile from the very beginning. I honestly believe that it's absolutely possible, within an institution and within an organization, to keep a fire a-glowing. We draw encouragement from the fact that there are some people who say that's exactly why they joined this congregation, because they found something alive and they want to keep that flame burning. And the strength of this congregation continues as long as there are those of us who earnestly pray that the zeal and the ardor of the flame of the Spirit remains alive. I think it's possible to retain movement within organization, AND With life being structured as it is today, I don't see how you can direct movement without some kind of organization. And I see nothing wrong with the Church standing up, as a mighty testimonial, as a mighty evidence of the truth of a gone-by ages. I've lived long enough to know that we need some things that remind us of the good of the past, and maybe this kind of a thing is something that we need desperately today.

Well, let's go back now. The high point of the service is intended to be the Benediction. We can't stay here. We come back here to be renewed, refreshed, energized....and then to get going. You're entitled to know of a fanciful notion that I have of an ideal congregation, where we'd all gather together on a Sunday, we'd have our service of worship...then the Benediction would be pronounced -- with a kind of "get with it, now! -- get moving! -- turn yourselves loose in the world!....then we'll come back again next Sunday, and

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we'll start all over again."

....get ready for the Benediction, won't you? It's going to come shortly. Remember the words of the text: "And they went forth, preaching everywhere, the Lord working with them."

* * * * * *

(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Misericordia Domini. The Second Sunday After Easter April 20, 1969

"STRAYING SHEEP"

O God, may what we could remember from this sermon be one good thing that might hold us in good stead in this week. Therefore, let Thy Holy Spirit lay hold upon not only the one who speaks the Word, but those who hear as well. Amen.

Did it ever occur to you what a difficult assignment a preacher has on a Sunday morning? He goes to the sacred desk, and he stands among his people.....and what a variety they represent.....

- - there's the wide spectrum of age...it could be in this service, as it will be in the next service, there may be those from infancy to old age, grandparents, great-grandparents.....
- - there's the wide spectrum of interests, because you represent a variety of professions, of walks of life.....
- - there's the great variety of temperament and personality, for none of us is exactly like somebody else.....
- - and of course there is the variety of the things that have claimed you in the past week -- some of you have made it right well this past week, and others, if you were absolutely honest, may have to admit it could have been one of the hardest weeks you've ever had.....
- - some of you sit here thinking not only of the past, but some of you are concerned with the immediate future - - some of you are thinking about yesterday...some of you are thinking about the demands of tomorrow.....

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> - - some of you have come from close by...it could be that some of you have been up less than three-quarters of an hour.... ...others of you have been up since six o'clock this morning.....some of you, it's only taken you five minutes to get here.....others of you who have come from Virginia, Sandy Springs, Olney, Ashton, Laurel, Bowie, Gaithersburg .....the things that have occupied your minds even as you have traveled here, wondering if perchance when you would arrive, you might arrive in safety, knowing what highway conditions are today....

...so the preacher stands among his people, knowing full well that he cannot fully appreciate for himself the mind-set and the background against which God asks him to proclaim His Word.

As I come to this sacred desk this morning I am particularly aware of this as I think of the gap between age and youth. Is it possible to preach a sermon that relates to people of different ages? Attending the Convention of the Central States Synod this early part of the week, I engaged a highly esteemed theologian in conversation, and he said that maybe we've made too much of this whole communications bit, as though a person has to communicate every single time he encounters somebody else and as though he is a complete failure if the person to whom he speaks does not fully understand what it is that he's trying to say. I'm not so sure that we ever fully communicate, because the one who speaks can never fully understand what it is in the back of your mind. You hear according to the way you want to hear. What the man says may not always be what he wants to say. The great curse may not be failure to communicate, but the curse may be upon us, failure to establish a rela-

tionship. This is of far greater importance.

I am reasonably certain that that grand and good father of mine tried many times to get something into that head of mine, and he walked away saying, "Raymond doesn't understand me." - - and he was absolutely right! - - because the forty years that he had on me provided him with an experience that I couldn't appreciate. This we must remember.

So maybe in the final analysis what needs to be said is that the thing that matters most is that we might establish a relationship and a respect for each other, even though we may never fully understand each other, and may never fully be able to communicate. The relationship is the paramount thing.

Now with that as a kind of prefatory statement, I have reason to believe that the relationship of this text that I'm about to share with you is the one thing that's going to hold all of us in good stead, because the text that I'm about to share with you comes from a man who remembered his youth, and as he came to the sunset slope in life, said what he had to say at that time in his life. So in this wide spectrum of age and youth, hear now the text: the 176th verse of the 119th Psalm:

> "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget Thy commandments - - "

The Psalm has something to say to all of us, because of a relationship which it establishes. One has the feeling when he reads this Psalm, which by the way is the longest of all the Psalms, but the Psalmist is recalling the days of his youth, and in one of the sections of the Psalm he says something absolutely magnificent: "With my whole heart I will seek Thy way, and I will not forget Thy commands - " - - - that's a grand gesture to wave in the face of God! - - and

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that's pure unadulterated youth, in their moment of idealism. And blessed indeed is that young person who has his noble moment with God, when he gives God to understand that from that moment on he will seek the ways of God and try to remember His commands.

Now, this relationship between age and youth - - the Psalmist comes to the end of what he's been saying....he's been talking for a long time, for 176 verses in fact.....and how does he end?

...with a note of triumph? with a note of praise?

with a note of accomplishment?

...but rather he comes to a very undramatic ending by saying,

> "I have gone astray like a lost sheep;
> seek thy servant; for I do not forget
> Thy commandments - - "

I earnestly hoped and prayed in the preparation of this sermon that it might be one sermon that I could preach that would mean something to everyone. So therefore, I've come to the conclusion as I've finished the sermon, that it's a sermon not only for the so-called good people - -

...and some of you allow yourselves to believe that you fall in that category. I'm not saying that sarcastically. In one of the most meaningful ventures that I've ever had with a group of youth, that week after Easter, when at Clagget Center 24 young people were entrusted to our care...and we talked about three things: "As I Seem To Me" - - "As I Seem To Others" - - "As God Sees Me".....a time of great soul-searching. Some of us gave each other to believe that when we thought about ourselves we had a fairly good opinion of ourselves, that we weren't the

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worst people in the world.....

...now for some of you who fall into this category of so-called good people, this sermon is meant for you.

And yet on the other hand, it's also meant for the so-called bad people, because there are some of us, when we go to bed at night, are haunted by what's parading in front of us, the evil that we've done, and the good that we've failed to do.

Now, right down the middle of the road the sermon in a certain sense is meant for both groups, the so-called bad and the so-called good, because in the final analysis, maybe that's what's to be said about all of us. We're not all good, we're not all bad - - we're a strange peculiar blend of both.

That's why when you properly understand Lutheran theology, we can rightly call ourselves the "sinning saved" - - which is not exactly the same thing as the "successful failure." But according to our Lutheran theology, every single one of us remains a sinner until the day that he dies. So the Psalmist, as he comes to the sunset slope of life, has to write down as the last thing that can be said, "I have gone astray" - - which is also to say, realistically, that in the school of Life my grades have not turned out half as well as they should, and my grades have not turned out as well as I would have liked to have had them turn out. I'm very fond of this Psalmist, because he reads it exactly as it is - - page after page in the Bible you can find those who tell it as it is -- this is not the new jargon. If it is the new jargon, it's simply to illustrate a basic fact of life that's always been illustrated in the Scriptures....because that's one thing you can say about the Bible if you can't say anything else, it's also very realistic.

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This man says, "I've gone astray. I admit it."

But on the other hand, he said, "I'm also the kind of person who knows that I shouldn't have gone astray, and I've tried to remember the commandments." And in between both of these thoughts he says, "God, you'd better seek your servant - - you'd better come after me -- you'd better find me!".....as much as to say, even in my blacker moments, I know that I wasn't meant to go to hell, and if there's any hope for my salvation it lies in my trust, not in myself, but in the one who comes seeking me.

Why is it, my friend, that for those of us who have lived longer than we have yet to live, we have to say, as we write at the bottom of our page, we've gone astray, we've not measured up. Who among us can honestly say that all that he had hoped to achieve he has achieved? Where is any man who can be absolutely self-confident of his record in life? Even in our most idealistic moments of life we must be realistic - - we have not measured up, we have fallen short.

What, now, is to be said when one reads life so realistically?

I think a man must remember that in the end God will not judge us so much by what we have done or by what we have failed to do, as much as He will judge us by the intention by which we endeavor to live out the days of our years. The longer I live, and the farther I get away from his death, the more I realize my debt to that great leader of our church, Franklin Clark Fry. The last soul-searching conversation that I had with him, when I looked upon him as the Pastor-of-Pastors and laid bare my soul concerning a particular problem, he said, "The examination that has to be made in the final analysis on anything is motivation and strategy: why you want to do what you plan to do and how you go about doing it." God is always searching our hearts, God is

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always asking us Why?

Maybe that's the final question that He's going to ask when we come to the end of our days, as He looks upon the evil that we've done He'll say

"Why did you do it?"

- - when He looks upon the good, whatever it may be that we'll offer to Him, the same searching question:

"Why did you do it?"

So when you and I are prone to suffer despair, realizing that the idealism of youth begins to wane at middle age, is despair to be the final answer? "Not so!" says the Psalmist, "Admit your failure, but still claim reliance upon God who comes to seek you and get you out of your miserable predicament." As long as this remains the noble intention, there ought to be in every man's heart the arrow of the compass that remains true, no matter how much he may fail and falter and fumble in the meantime.

Stephen Graham once wrote of his journey to Jerusalem with the Russian pilgrims:

> "Whoever has wished to go has already started on the pilgrimage. And once you have started, every step on the road is a step towards Jerusalem. Even steps which have no meaning are taking you by by-ways and lanes to the high road. For the heart guides the steps, and has intentions too deep for the mind to grasp. The true Christian is he who has the wishing heart - - in whose heart is a little compass box where an arrow always points steadily to Jerusalem."

Do you know what we're all about here in Saint Luke Church when we deal with our ministry to young people? It's the one thing that I keep trying to say to every person involved in ministry to youth, and I may say it in a hundred and different ways, but it all comes out in the end simply as this: our business and our every relationship with youth is to give them a kind of

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foundation and to point them in the right direction. We do not deal with perfect material, not any more than those of us who deal with them are perfect. By the grace of God we can point the right direction, if only out of the testimony of our own experience we know that the direction is still a valid one. So to those wyo are young, with all the idealism of youth, know full well I speak with the voice of experience, you will fail, you will falter, you will fumble. Coaches tell me that one of the first things they have to teach some of their athletes is how to rise after they've fallen. Despite the fact that you may fail and falter and fumble, there is still one who comes seeking you, calling you back to the right road. This you can most certainly believe.

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I suppose it would be a wonderful thing if I could end the sermon at this point. But I can't. Granted we recognize the truth that we will be as sheep who stray, and granted that we may honestly believe that there will be somebody who will come and take us back, nonetheless God, who is a compassionate leader, is also the Lord of Justice, and we live in a world where there is always this matter of consequence. It still remains a terrible thing to stray.

Let me read for you now -- very poor poetry, no teacher of poetry would ever allow a student to bring this in, but I don't know of anything that I've read in recent time that expresses the thought quite as well -- I'm talking now about the consequence of straying, and the responsibility that you have for others who follow in your path, once you've begun to stray. You might be brought back to the path, but the wrong that was done while you were straying cannot be ignored:

" 'Twas a sheep not a lamb that strayed away
In the parable Jesus told;
A grown-up sheep had gone astray
From the ninety-nine in the fold.

Out on the hillside, out in the cold,
'Twas a sheep the good shepherd sought,
And back to the flock, safe into the fold,
'Twas a sheep the Good Shepherd brought.

And why for the sheep should we earnestly long,
And as earnestly hope and pray?
Because there is danger, if they go wrong,
They will lead the lambs astray.

For the lambs will follow the sheep, you know,
Wherever the sheep may stray;
When the sheep go wrong, it will not take long
Till the lambs are as wrong as they.

And so with the sheep we earnestly plead
For the sake of the lambs today,
If the lambs are lost, what a terrible cost
Some sheep will have to pay. "

Anon.

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In that screen production of the musical "Oliver" there's that very fascinating and intriguing and equally despicable character Fagin. He's the one, according to Dickens, you see, who gets the waifs, and trains these youngsters to become pickpockets. Toward the end of the production he's reviewing the situation. Being a realist, he finds himself in the situation in which he is. For a moment we're led to believe that he's going to take a turn in the road and turn a new leaf, turn his back on the evil past and look to a better future.....and we're quite pleased with the prospect. Only as he walks away he sees there the Artful Dodger, the most clever of all the pickpockets that he's trained....there he is.

I wish I could tell you that Fagin mends his ways. He doesn't. But I must also tell you what I thought when I dealt with the fact that there was the possibility that he would - - - what about the Artful One whom he had trained? Suppose Fagin would have mended his ways, but the evil paths that he had taken in asking the Artful One to follow after him - - who could control that? Who could erase that damage?

Thomas Carlysle said "It's always a serious thing to live." It's a serious thing to live in God's sight. God be praised for sheep who go astray, that the Shepherd who seeks is a compassionate leader who sacrifices his life that they might be restored...

...but the other side of the coin can never be ignored. Life still exacts its consequences.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Jubilate. The Third Sunday After Easter April 27, 1969

"PRAYING MEN"
(Luke 18:9-14)

You may recall that we said last September that quite generally, from that time until June, the sermons to be preached from this pulpit would deal with the parables spoken by our Blessed Lord. Today we resume a part of that series.

And that parable that commands our attention today is recorded in the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. It begins with the 9th verse:

> "And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:
> Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.
> The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.
> I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.
> And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.
> I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

All men alike pray. But all men do not pray alike.

That's not just a play on words. It's a statement of fact. I'm reasonably certain that it could be established through scientific research that any man, anywhere, at some given time will recognize the fact that there is

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over and above him some thing, some One, some Power, some Principle, some Force....that he himself cannot control.....

....and that significantly enough, this Power, this Thing, this Force, this Principle, controls his life....

.....and that if he would, and if he could, he'd try to make contact with that Power, that Force, that Principle, that Thing.

For some people, this is what prayer is - - trying to make contact, with the Power, the Principle, with a Person. Others call it, describe it, as communion, having fellowship, being able to talk about the things that you deem important, and the things that you'd like to have this Power, this Principle, this Person, respect.

And if the person believes that it's within that Power's grasp to make his influence available in his behalf, then he keeps talking away, and hammering, and persisting....with the fervent hope that perhaps something will be done for him.

No matter how you may analyze it, I think it can be said, all men alike pray - - but this is not to say that all men pray alike.

They will pray, of course, according to their understanding of the basic nature and character of that person, that Principle, or that Power. They will approach that Person, that Principle, that Power according to whether or not they believe that this Power, this Person, this Principle, is approachable. They will talk about the things that they honestly believe that they can talk about in the presence of this Thing, or Person, over and above them.

We Christians are of all people the most fortunate. We ought to keep saying this to ourselves.

We are the most fortunate for two reasons aside from the fact that God

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has come to us in Christ to redeem us. And alongside of that a Christian should keep saying to himself, there should be no question in his mind as to the basic nature and character of God, for as the Apostle Paul could say:

"In Jesus Christ all the fullness of God
has been pleased to dwell."

...no one who claims to be a Christian should have any doubt whatsoever as to the basic nature and character of God. How fortunate we are.

If you've read anything at all of comparative religions, you will know that this is one of the things that "bugs" the heathen and the pagan. He knows that out there there's some Thing, or some One, but he just doesn't know what he's like. We Christians? - - we have the Scriptures for it, we have the evidence in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. We know what He's like.

And as over against that, we have the added advantage that Jesus Christ came to us, and He taught us how to pray - - He taught us how to get in contact with this God. He told us the things that we have a perfect right to talk about when we pray. How fortunate we Christians are, the most fortunate of all people: Bod's been revealed to us -- we know what He's like -- we know how He ought to be approached.

This parable which serves as the basis for today's sermon is a lesson in prayer. It deals with two men who prayed.

...all men alike pray - - but all men do not pray alike.....
.....these two men did not pray alike.

I used to believe that it was pleasing in God's sight when any time, any man turned to Him prayerfully. I used to believe that it was to a man's credit if he bowed his head and in reverence and respect acknowledged the fact that there was Someone over and above him. But this is not the complete

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virtue. What we need to talk about, according to what Jesus Christ strikes as the clarion note in this parable, is our demeanor in the presence of God, the way we approach Him, the way we conduct ourselves when we pray. To pray is never enough. The acid test is: to what end do you pray, and how do you pray?

Please recognize the fact that both of these men prayed.

"Two men went up into the temple - - to pray."

Jesus tells us how they prayed. And after having told us how they prayed, then He said one thing about one man which was not the same thing that He said about the other man. One of them received commendation. The other received condemnation. It makes you feel a bit uncomfortable, doesn't it, that a man who would turn to God prayerfully should receive condemnation?

If that thought makes you feel a bit uncomfortable, stick with me now as we unfold the balance of this sermon, particularly when I remind you that the man who received the condemnation from Jesus Christ was a good man!

....I'm taking the liberty of saying that to you even though I realize that Jesus Christ condemned him. I'm saying he was a good man because that's the way you would brand him. To make it as contemporary as today - - -

> ...I'm quite certain that the Committee on Membership and Evangelism of this congregation would be thrilled to high heaven if we could find a member like him....he was the kind of a man who always showed up whenever there was a meeting.... ...he was the kind of a man who would volunteer for service -- he wouldn't wait to be asked....he wouldn't be the kind of a person who had to be coaxed, he wouldn't be the kind of a person who would wear his feelings on his sleeve...he felt a

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sense of obligation. In this sense he was a good man! ...any congregation could use his type, as regards this kind of goodness.

.....I could well imagine how our Committee on Stewardship, if it went over the rolls of this congregation, could find any number of people very much like him - - he measures up beautifully.....if there was a contribution to be made, he'd give far more than what was expected of him - - you have his word for it when he was praying! - - - the Jewish church in that day expected people to tithe their income... but this fellow tithed everything that he had!....he was the kind of a fellow, if you really want to know it, to make it as contemporary - - if he got an inheritance, the first thing he'd do: "Lord, you take 10% of it!" - - if he got a bonus, the first thing he'd do: "Lord, you take 10% of it."....he tithed everything that he possessed. What Committee on Stewardship in any congregation wouldn't be thrilled to high heaven to find a member like that!

....the Committee on Social Ministry - - he took seriously the opportunity to witness....he was that type of chap.

Yet this is the man that Jesus Christ condemned!

He was decent. He was honorable. He was a member of the congregation in good standing. I can well recognize what the Rabbi might have said when he died, the eulogy that he would give in his behalf. And no one, undoubtedly, would have found fault.

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Now on the other hand, here's the other fellow. You're not forgetting him, are you? How dare you! He was the one that Jesus praised (now I can say it) - - He praised him to high heaven!

Who was he? He was a scoundrel-of-sorts. Let me give you the picture:

> ....he was despised by his fellow members - - and they had reasons to despise him - - and he was ostracized. He was the worst kind of Jew because he took advantage of other Jews. This is always the worst kind of person....
>
> > ...the situation was this. The Roman government was the occupying authority of Judea. They had a tax levied. Now this fellow was a tax-collector, and tax-collectors are never popular at any time....and this one unpopularly more so. The Roman government would say, "We would exact from this province so much....now this is what we expect you to return to us, but you can get whatever you can get. We won't lay down a rule-of-thumb."......and that's precisely what a Publican would do -- he'd turn over to the Roman authorities so much, but then he'd bleed the people for as much as he possibly could. And that's just one thing that those people couldn't stomach -- that one of their own kind would bleed them, and bleed them in order to give their money to the foreigner who was occupying their land.

And yet this was the man that Jesus Christ commended!

> "Two men went up into the temple to pray: the one a Pharisee.....and the other a publican."

The one man was commended. The other is condemned. Why?

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If I know anything at all about the mind of God, there are only, in His sight, two kinds of people: those who are trying to be better than they are.....and those who are not.

The Pharisee, you see, had arrived. When he came to talk with God, all he could talk about was his goodness. But in the sight of God a man never has it made! Kierkegaard used to say, "I'm absolutely sure of the salvation of everybody else, except myself." - - and that's a rather healthy stage in which to live. The trouble with being good is that we can become proud of it. I once heard Dr. Orso tell the story about a man who was highly esteemed by his co-workers, and they thought they'd have a dinner in his honor, to recognize his virtues. And one of his virtues was humility. So they gave him a medallion announcing his humility

.....the only trouble was, they had to take it back in several weeks because the fellow began to wear it! There is always the peril of goodness that runs the risk of becoming proud.

The publican, on the other hand, knew only one thing about himself: He hadn't arrived. And in God's sight he couldn't be proud.

It's risky business for any man to strut into the presence of God. My friend, Dr. Harkins, who had spent a number of years as Assistant to Dr. Fry as President of our church, who came to know him so intimately, said that one of the things that grieved him so very much was that people thought he was a very proud person. Dr. Fry was a man of tremendous strength, and a giant. One of the weaknesses some of us smaller folks have is always to rail out against those who are giants, when we can't blame them with anything else, and we try to fault them as being proud. Dr. Harkins could say of Dr. Fry: "He was bold

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before any man, in his attempt and in his endeavor to do with zeal the work of the Lord, but he was most humble in the sight of God."

All men alike pray. But all men do not pray alike.

All men alike pray. But all men do not pray aright.

> "Two men went up into the temple to pray: the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican - -
>
> - - I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Prayer offered by Pastor Shaheen
April 27, 1969

O GOD, The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we give Thee thanks that Thou hast seen fit to reveal Thyself to us in Thy Son, and through Him we have been encouraged to approach Thee and to make known our hearts' desires.

NOW, before we leave this place as a gathered company we turn to Thee, and these are the things we'd like to talk about in Your presence:

- we'd like to talk to You about ourselves. We'd like to serve You better than we do. We'd like to shake off the shackles of sin that so easily beset us. And yet, O God, we know that we are imprisoned by all that we've been before, conditioned by all that we've thought before. Dear God, You are the miracle-worker - - let a miracle happen in our lives, that Christ may so rule our thoughts and our hearts and our minds that we may become the kind of person worthy of Your commendation.

- Heavenly Father, we'd like to talk about those whom we love. Some of them are lonely, some of them don't know how much we love them, some of them don't know how much we suffer for them. O God, in Your own way do for them what we would do, but are unable to do because of our limitations, and theirs as well.

- O God, we'd like to talk with you about those whom we know who are ill, so easily beset by the troubles of this world.

- We'd like to talk with you about those who are prone to walk at a great distance from You. O God, help us to become as a beacon in the way that they may see the path again.

- O God, we'd like to talk to you about this congregation. We want to do Your work. We want to do it in Your way, and we're grateful for all who help us to become a reflection of the Kingdom itself.

O God, we'd like to talk to you about this world. It's a wicked world, yet it's the world that you've made and it's the world for which you gave Your Son to die, and You love it. Help us never to forget it, that it's still a world upon which you have not turned Your back.

- Heavenly Father, we want to talk to you about the meaning of life - - Thy servant, Clyde Niemeyer, who has passed from the Church Militant into the Church Triumphant, that in his passing we may be mindful of the days of our years, and we may put out trust in Thee.

OUR FATHER . . .

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Cantate. The Fourth Sunday After Easter May 4, 1969

"SONS OF THE WORLD"

God's Great Galilean, the carpenter's-son-turned-preacher, is remembered for a number of things and in many different ways. The Gospel writers made much of the fact that He told stories, for after all He was one who came teaching. And His preferred method of teaching was to tell a story.

These Sundays now we have been dealing with some of the stories that Jesus told, the parables that came from His lips. A man is perfectly right when he refers to a parable as an "earthly tale with a heavenly meaning." Some of the stories He made up. Others were stories that were made out of the material of real life. At one time or another He may have encountered this character or that character, and as He remembered him, He recited the incident, and then pointed a moral or dealt with a fundamental truth.

One of the telling things that we discover when we read some of these parables is that the outstanding character is not always exemplary. Sometimes He took a chap who was rather unsavory, or a person who was rather disrespectful, told the story about him. He was the first one, I suppose, to really 'tell it as it is' - - the bare unvarnished truth -- He laid it on the line. And in order to prove His point, He might take an unsavory character.

One that was very respectful that comes to mind at once, as far as I'm concerned, is a story of a woman who pestered a judge. She was extremely persistent. She was the kind of a woman who perhaps found out where the judge lived, and then she waited at the curb...she tried to hail him when he came home. If she had no success then, she'd be there early in the morning, and as he headed for the office she'd be the kind of a person who would stop him right in his path,

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and begin to tell him her lament and to make her plea in no uncertain way. No matter where he seemed to turn, there was always this pestering person. Now Jesus said, "After all, the judge did pay attention to her, and in the end she got what she wanted, because she happened to be persistent."

"Now," Jesus said, thinking of this rather disrespectful person, "Why don't you who follow me take a page from her book, and understand full well that your Heavenly Father, who is a God of love, wants to pay attention to you....and when you turn to Him, even if it must be with persistence, you can have the assurance that He will hear you and He will grant your wish, because He loves you."

Then there's that other story. It's recorded in the 16th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, the first nine verses, and constitutes the Scriptural setting for today's sermon. It's classified as one of the most difficult of all the parables to understand, and if you've read it, you might readily recognize why this should be true.

The character in this story, as Jesus told it, was a man who worked for a very wealthy Jew land-holder. Now whenever a man's business got to the extent that this man's holdings had arrived, he needed somebody to oversee his business, and so he looked out until he found a man that was capable and also trustworthy. And he put this man in a position of much responsibility.

Now, because of the weakness of human nature, this man exploited his position, lined his own pockets, and defrauded the man for whom he worked. Truth will out. When it came to the attention of the man who owned the business that this was the kind of character that this agent was, he immediately took him to task and gave him notice that he was going to be dismissed.

Now what does the character do? Immediately he says to himself, as he

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realizes what's happening, "I'd better find out how to handle this situation at once. What shall I do?" That was the question of questions.

Because he was the kind of man that he was, this is how he handled the problem. He went to some of the men who owed his master money, and I can imagine how he talked with them - - -

> "I wish you know how much money he has in the bank! I wish you knew what his holdings really are - - you'd be surprised if I were to tell you right now how much he really owns....in fact he owns so much he doesn't know how much he owns. If you want my opinion, I don't think it's right that he bleeds you the way he does. I think he's exacting far more from you people than what he ought to exact, and it just isn't fair. The poor get poorer, the rich get richer....
>
> ....now, I'll tell you what I'm going to do. Trust me now, because I'm in a position to do it - - I'm the one who keeps the books. You owe him so much - - as far as the record is concerned, I'm going to cut it right in half! He can afford it - - you can't. He'll never miss it....."

So he went from one account to another and talked in much the same manner.

Again, truth will out. The man who owned the business found this out. And I suppose because he realized that he was as well off as he was, he could afford the trace of a smile, and he said to the chap, "You scoundrel!"

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....and smiled as he said it....."I'll give you credit for one thing -- you're clever -- and you're shrewd -- and you're resourceful -- and you've devised a very clever strategy."

So Jesus told the story.

And then remember, Jesus always told a story for a purpose. Jesus wanted to make a point. He ended by saying, "I tell you that the sons of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light...

....as much as to say, Why don't you good people believe in God, taking a page from the book of this scoundrel?

What was Jesus trying to tell us when He said that? I think He was trying to tell us several things.

First, in the scoundrel's behavior, the scoundrel discovered that he was at a point, now, where he had to do something, and that he didn't have much time in which to do it. Time was running out. This last despicable, although clever, thing that he did, he did because he exploited what little time he had left before he'd have to pack his bags, close his desk, and seek employment elsewhere - - - in the little time that he had, he decided to use it as cleverly as he could, to make the most of every hour and to make the most of every contact...

...so Jesus, I think, is saying to us: "Use wisely and properly the time that you have."

While I may know little about you, I think I can say of every single one of us who happens to be here that time is running out. It's just a fact of life. Yesterday, in a day that I hoped would be given quietly to the study,

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there were three unscheduled interruptions to which I willingly gave myself as a pastor, and as I dealt with each one of them I valued all over again the meaning of a single hour. Time does have a way of running out. God's precious gift to us is time. In fact, sometimes I wonder if the only thing that you and really have that we can call our own, which comes by God's hand, is time. No man has a guarantee of the next 25 minutes, the next 5 minutes.

You may recall how perfectly beautiful it was the last Lord's Day, when we had that unexpected discovery of five minutes before the hour was spent. And I very properly, I think, encouraged you to use it with talking with one another outside, basking in the beauty of the day.

I decided to practice what I had encouraged you to do, so I stood outside at the two brief stairs leading to the red doors. As I was shaking hands and making conversation, willingly and gladly and I hope properly, suddenly there came in front of me -- now I can tell you, I didn't know it then -- a bride of three years, vivacious, charming.....and in an unhibited moment I said to her, "You look like a breath of spring."

...last night during the dinner hour the telephone rang, and her mother called and said, "We're not members of Saint Luke Church, but it means a great deal to be able to worship with you occasionally. We were there last Sunday. Now for identification purposes, maybe you'll recall that you said to someone, "You look like a breath of spring' - - she's our daughter. She's just gotten word that her husband was killed in Vietnam. Would you please come?"

...time - - it's God's precious gift to us. That's why I said to you, being far more prescient than I knew, when I said, "Let's take time to talk with each other" that past Sunday, to say some encouraging word

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to a fellow pilgrim along the way. One never knows what the future has in store. The one thing that we might be able to do to one another is to speak the helpful word.

Some of you perhaps may become a bit weary in my unashamed manner by referring to it, but I pray each day for grace and strength that I might make the most of each day, and every relationship with each person, working harder now than I've ever worked in my life, and I'm fully cognizant of the fact that there are some of us who have lived longer than we have yet to live. The Scriptures put it magnificently -- "redeeming the time" -- making the wise use of it.

When I become a bit weary of those age-old concepts of Hell and Judgment and punishment, and when I think of the after-life, as any man ought to think of it, quite frankly I don't get too much comfort out of thinking of Hell, nor do I allow myself to think of the Devil there with pitch-fork in hand, and the terrible bottomless pit...brimstone, fire and damnation. But rather I've gotten to the place now, when I think of time of Judgment, being confronted by Jesus Christ who says to me: "I am the Giver of Life - - that's

what I gave you -- a certain time to live - - "

...and the concept of Judgment that stirs me to the depth of my soul now is to be confronted by Him, at journey's end, and then have Him put to me the question: "Well, what did you make of it?"

To the credit of that scoundrel, he had only so much time, and he made up his mind he was going to use, and make the most of it.

The second thing to be said about that scoundrel, who happens to be the chosen character in the story that Jesus holds up as exemplary, was that he knew not only that something had to be done, but he knew that he had to come

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to a decision as to just what it was that had to be done. This is the problem for many of us, not that we ought to act, but how shall we act? What is it that ought to be done? That hard-to-understand parable, (you can read it again today, hopefully -- Luke 16:1-9) just can't be ignored. Rather unwillingly we may have to conclude that the "hero" in Christ's tale is being commended not for his virtue (comennow, he was a scoundrel!) but rather for his strategy. So what's the point? Could it be that Christ is saying to us that the high marks in His school of discipleship are reserved chiefly for those who both desire to be good and know how to go about being good.

For what comfort it may be to you parents, by and large you've done a far better job than you may realize in teaching your children that they ought to be good. You Sunday School teachers draw some measure of comfort from that thought, too. But the problem of problems comes when a youngster has to find out for himself just how he goes about being good. We Christians have shied away from strategy far too often. It's a good and salutary thing to become a stretegist for Jesus Christ. Sometimes I think this is the great problem of the Church today. In its terrific desire to get with the world, and to do something, it hasn't always used the wisest strategy. It's one thing to want to do good, it's the other thing to be able to do it in the wisest possible way.....

...Well, Jesus was talking about this scoundrel, who knew not only that he had to act, but he had to figure out a plan.

The next thing that I think Jesus is trying to tell us about this scoundrel is that when he did act, he acted single-mindedly - - nothing deterred him --- he had one purpose. So little time? - - but one purpose, and he made every step count that he took. For shame upon us Christians - - we're the half-hearted

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ones, you know. We fool ourselves into believing that God is so good that we can get away with anything. The pastors that I respect are always the pastors who give themselves with zeal to challenging their people to becoming better than they are, and forever holding in front of them high standards, then pursuing those standards, single-mindedly.

Jesus Christ never asked for a half-hearted surrender. I've become impatient with the book that I have been reading lately. It's the study book for Confirmation and First Communion. Someone very foolishly has suggested that we ought not to ask youngsters to make formal vows concerning their commitment to Jesus Christ. How far from the track can we become! Jesus Christ never says to any man, "I want you to submit to my way of life for maybe the next five years." He who is Lord and Master of life asks for complete surrender.

This is why so much of our Christianity is anemic -- and lack-lustre -- because we go about it in a half-hearted way. One of the joys that came during the week was the ringing of the telephone bell, the answering of the phone, and hearing a voice saying, "I've just gotten something that I've got to share with you -- can I come over right now?"....and of course we made time for her to come right now. She brought a letter, written by her 17-year old brother. He just had to tell her, and the other members of his family. I have her permission to read it to you:

> " I am making a carbon copy of this letter to you because I feel it is worth letting you all know about.
>
> Now this is going to sound "corny" but I want you to know that I am sincere in everything I'm about to say. This last weekend I took a 2-day furlough. Friday night I thought I might go to church to the Youth Lay Witness Mission. But instead I went to the miniature golf course. . .

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Saturday noon I decided to go to church and see what this "mission" was all about. I was told they were really something, but when I got there I saw kids hugging each other and saying "God loves you and I love you!" Boy! I thought that was just about the "dorkiest" (that's a new word for me, it may be for you, too - R.S.) thing I had ever seen. I really wasn't very impressed with the whole thing so I went to a track meet and decided not to go back to church that night.

When night came, however, I found myself at church eating hot dogs and beans and singing right along with the rest of the group. (about 75 teenagers---48 were from out of town as far away as Abilene.) Later, we split into small groups of about 9 or 10 per group and each group had a room to themselves. Man, people, what went on in that group ~~and~~ session was really great. First, the group leader, an Aggie from A&M, asked the question "What is standing between you and God?" The room was silent for a long time. Then Craig, the group leader, said "Boy! This is a good group because nobody has anything between them and God!" "Wait a minute!" I said. "I'm still trying to cound all the things that are keeping me far from God!" I went on to say that I thought it might be nice to let God and Christ into my life, but I was sure it wouldn't happen. And right then and there---the whole group put everything down and prayed out loud for me! Wow! That was a thrill, if nothing else! What that did, tho', was make me want to accept Christ into my life. They said that once you let Him in, He is there to stay. That bothered me a little bit because I wasn't sure that I wanted someone like Him around all the time. But I could see that all those kids who had let Christ in at previous Lay Witness Missions were a whole lot happier than I was.

After about 2 1/2 hours of discussing and praying for each other, we set our chairs in a circle and put one in the middle and called it the prayer chair. Now, this chair is the one you sit in when you decide you want to open the door and let Christ in to stay. I'm telling you I really wanted to sit in that chair and give my life to the Lord, but I was flat-out SCARED!! I can't explain the feeling. Sounds dumb, doesn't it?

Then I thought back over my whole life. What had been so great about it? Nothing, really. I looked at the big group at the church cafeteria and saw all the happy faces and complete contentment in their eyes. I wanted that! . . . . "

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It does happen. Amazing grace, and it's allowed to have free rein in a man's soul....and then when a man responds single-mindedly.

If you lack lustre in your Christian life, my friend, it may be because you're a half-hearted Christian. Jesus had something to tell about that, and He told it in an unexpected way, using an unsavory character, and yet He said, "Why can't we be as wise, and as astute, and as resourceful, as the sons of the world?"

* * * *

(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

"RICH FOOL"
(Luke 12:13-21)

Great men receive strange and unusual requests. When our Blessed Lord was here on earth and as He moved around from place to place, people out of the crowd would come to Him and ask Him to do certain things, certain things which I suppose very rightfully He could say to Himself, "These are not in my portfolio -- this specifically is not in the job description which my Heavenly Father outlined for me".....you and I may be shocked a bit at that kind of an interpretation, yet here's the record for it. Listen now as I read for you the Scriptural passage which serves as the basis for today's sermon, as once more we consider another of the parables spoken by our Blessed Lord:

> "And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.
> And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?
> And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.
> And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:
> And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?
> And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.
> And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.
> But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou has provided?
> So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

I suppose it can be said that most of the people that you and I know among our friends and acquaintances, who live in metropolitan Washington and its environs,

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could use a little more money than they presently have. This is still to be said, even though we live in so-called affluent area. This is why, undoubtedly, the unexpected or sought-after college scholarship for that college-age son or daughter, this is why that unexpected year-end bonus, or the cost-of-living in the salary adjustment, or even a Social Security check, may still come as a welcome if not a necessary factor in our day-by-day and month-by-month existence.

While it is true that in our day we are becoming increasingly aware of the impoverished, it may well be that that's an established fact only because many have never had it so good, and the contrast becomes a stark reality. We may say to ourselves, there are no pockets in a shroud, yet most of us round out the days of our years still trying to amass some kind of a comfortable bank balance. And that most certainly is true of our productive years.

The fool, we say, is the man who doesn't think in terms of tomorrow. The fool is a man who squanders his day's earnings, or his inheritance, who becomes a spendthrift. Yet our Blessed Lord on one occasion said a man was a fool just because he happened to be the kind of a person who took thought to the future---- he was industrious - - he was a shrewd chap, who had a way of making every single dollar count. The chap that our Blessed Lord condemned in the story that He told was a man whose problem-of-problems wasn't how to make his first million, but rather how to take care of the second million that was already in the making!

Aren't we to praise a man who gives himself industriously to trying to get ahead? Yet Jesus Christ, in this parable that you just heard, calls a man a fool who had arrived, who had financial security - - he did have it made.

What, then, was wrong?

The trouble with this fellow was that he had it so well made that he could

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say to himself, "I can take it easy from here on in, I can relax, I can enjoy myself." Will you bear with me when I use the language of the street, when I tell you that this man had arrived at the place where his only concern was himself - - - "and the hell with anybody else."

...the Scriptures put it very properly, "Take thine ease, eat, drink, be merry" - - that's just a dignified way of saying, "Nobody else counts. I need have no concern for anybody else except Number One." So Jesus condemned this man because he had amassed his store of this world's goods, and had found himself now in the state of apathy ...indifferent....unmoved by any other person's condition or plight.

This was not the time when our Blessed Lord called to people's attention the fact that when they go about to amass much of this world's goods, that they run the risk of coming to the end of the road unsatisfied, if not dissatisfied. Surely this was the next chapter which this man had to discover. But Jesus stops him in his tracks even before that discovery was made....

> ...do I not remember reading somewhere that John D. Rockefeller, Sr. was supposed to have said, "I'd give 20 million dollars for a new stomach . . . "
>
> ....Charlie Schwab, at one time Pennsylvania's distinguished citizen, having amassed a world's fortune, ends his years very much alone, with nothing but himself on his hand, and lamenting the fact that all the people whom he had befriended in life had now so soon forgotten him.....
>
> ....the beloved Queen Elizabeth, as her life ebbs out, was supposed to have said, "My kingdom, if only for another inch of time! . . "

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Our Blessed Lord on occasion spoke in this spirit, to those who had spent their time and their energy trying to amass the things of this world.

He was a wise and good man who came from the land of my fathers, his name Abraham Mitrey Ribale....listen to what he had to say even four decades ago as he surveyed our Western scene: "You call your thousand material devices 'labor-saving machinery', yet you are forever 'busy.' With the multiplying of your machinery you grow increasingly fatigued, anxious, nervous, dissatisfied. Whatever you have, you want more; and wherever you are, you want to go somewhere else - - your devices are neither time-saving nor soul-saving" . . .

as you read carefully this parable that our Blessed Lord used to illustrate his principal truth, He said something about a man's life, and then He said a man's life does not consist of the abundance of the things that he happend to possess. A man's life. In essence, that's about the only thing that a man ever has. It's peculiarly his - - his life.....this span of time between your birth and your death - - - it's uniquely yours.

I hope the day will never come when I will stand unmoved as I hold in the crook of my arm a baby, whether it be to fondle it or to care for it for somebody else, or to name it for Jesus Christ - - - to realize what God is uniquely bestowing upon this form -- Life.

This past week it seemed to me that I had more than my share of encounter with people who are struggling along the highway of life, whether they realize it or not, this is the kind of thing that's written largely upon the fabric of men's minds and of their hearts. Just slightly evident, but there's an intimation as I meet with confirmands, the wonder of life, in their impressionable years.....to

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meet with a group of house-wives in Bethany in four hours in a retreat session. A wise man once said, "You have only to sit down for less than an hour, if you have any basic integrity in your heart at all, with somebody else, and if you've touched base with life in all directions, eventually your conversation will come to the things that matter most, how to make meaning out of this span of years between birth and death....

....there was a struggle of struggles last night with a bunch of college students at Bethany, trying to articulate, almost defying the concept that God does concern Himself with every single life, and that God does hold us responsible for what we do with our life...wrestling with this: Can a man believe that life can have meaning, that life was designed for a purpose?

One of the most famous examples in modern biography is the case of the great Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy. He had worked hard at his literary labors, and had won both wealth and fame and was happily married. Then when he was about half-way through his middle 40's, when he might seem to have had all that his heart could wish, he suddenly began to wonder what the use of it all was. It's a very moving story. He describes the thing afterward in these words:

> "Five years ago a strange condition of mental torpor began to grow upon me. The same questions continually presented themselves - - Why? - - and What afterwards? My life had come to a sudden stop. I could eat, I could drink, I could sleep, indeed I couldn't help doing so. But there was no real life in me. Life had no meaning for me . . "

That was the beginning of a crisis that led to his conversion.

I don't know when it may hit you, my friend, but count yourself fortunate if at some juncture in life you are confronted with the fact that you either have or have not discovered a meaning in your life. The saddest of all things is to come to the end of one's journey, and to look back, and still ask: was it worth

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it? what was it all about anyway?

Very quickly in the moments that remain for the preaching of this sermon, what did Jesus Christ give people to understand was the meaning of a life?

...am I to tell you Sunday after Sunday when you come to this place, that the purpose in your life is to be found by trying to please God and to please God alone? - -that you should live out the days of your years with the sole prospect of one day going to Heaven?

> ...I should tell you that, and I have told you that, and I can tell you that, but I say it to you now with a word of warning: a man's sole purpose would not be simply to have a relationship between God and himself. This is where much of our religious experience bogs down. It's always the danger of a little prayer group, no matter how precious, no matter how nobly intentioned, because even prayer groups, like individuals, can sort of "zero-in" on God, allow the rest of the world to go by.
>
> ...it's also the risk of the people who mean well, and who give themselves to noble objectives in life, and then they reach the place where they think God is extremely pleased with their behavior and they needn't much care about anybody' else's objective or venture...

...will you want me to tell you as you come to this place Sunday by Sunday that your purpose in life is simply to improve the lot of other people?

> ...I would hope that you've heard this by this time. But there's one thing that I hope you haven't heard - - and that is that the net result of a man's life should simply be to

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put bread on somebody else's table, and clothing on somebody else's back. It's never enough just to meet the needs of the body. This is where we have to watch ourselves today, lest we get things out of proper focus and balance, where the "have-nots" would simply steal, and grasp, and take, just because they happen to believe that they have a right to what somebody else has.....

The haunting echo of the voice of God down through the corridors of time still reminds that the Kingdom of God does not consist of eating and drinking, no matter how earnestly we must give ourselves to improving the lot of the impoverished. We make a mistake when we try to equate the teachings of Jesus Christ with any particular social or political scheme. Our Blessed Lord spoke about the Kingdom of God:

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you."

The Kingdom of God has both its material and its spiritual aspects, and the one dare not be emphasized at the expense of the other. I must give bread to my brother, not just because it's a problem that's materialistic, but because the welfare of my soul is at stake, if having, I do not give.....and the welfare of his soul is at stake, if receiving, he does not appreciate the spiritual significance of a loaf of bread.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Pentecost May 25, 1969

"ON WHOM THE SPIRIT CAME"

I don't recall ever having read a full-length biography of Adolph Hitler. I don't suppose there are very many of such biographies written. It could be that he's the kind of character that we'd like very, very much to forget. Yet if some historian does come along and wants to make much of the life and the times of Adolph Hitler, there is one thing, it seems to me, that he will most certainly emphasize, and that was a very clever technique of Adolph Hitler. I'll phrase it for you in different ways . . .

...his use of power

...his misuse of power

...his abuse of power . . .

That strange animal that he was, from the very beginning he was able to get the start that he did by getting people to believe that he was far more powerful than he actually was. With almost no effort at all, he went into certain countries, got them to believe that he was overwhelmingly strong, and that they were very, very weak - - that they couldn't possibly withstand his machine.....and if they doubted the fact, he'd at least give some token effort and they would capitulate.

On the other hand, he gave that man from England to believe that he most certainly would not mis-use his power, or abuse it....and that man from England went back, and what a sad day it was for England.

Adolph Hitler knew how to use what little power he might have had very cleverly when he stood up to address a group of people. He made certain that there were in the audience people on whom he could depend, who followed his line without

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question. And then, have I not been told, on the platform where he spoke there was somebody in control of a series of buttons, and these would be touched at the precise moment, to create a variety of effects of light and sound, and to get people to a feverish point by which they would applaud him - - magnified many times than what the actual fact was in itself.....a very clever thing, to use even that kind of power, limited as it was, to overwhelm an audience.

Amont the number of different people that Winifred and I had live with us in the post-war years in the parsonage in Williamsport was a German war bride. She had come upon hard times in America. Her life had fallen apart. But then to distract her we would talk of many other things, and very carefully and very properly we'd talk about her days, as a Hitler Youth - - how she got caught up in this thing, overwhelmed by the power of his personality. She worked in a kind of signal corps, and she said even to the very end, when they were crushed, his propaganda machine was still at work, getting them to believe that he was sending many more planes into the air, and rockets, than was actually so...this use, mis-use, abuse of power, to the very end.

But who among us doesn't recognize the meaning of power? Human as we are, we're overwhelmed by those who are superior to us, or who get us to believe that they can overwhelm us by their strength, and then we become crippled as we focus upon our weakness. At every significant point in history there has always been a power struggle. So it seems that whenever people get together, eventually it ends in a play for power. A well-known columnist whose articles are read from coast to coast maintains that friction is the one word that characterizes our day, the friction that results when one group is pitted against another group, one race pitted against another race, one class pitted against another class.....

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...and at the root of it all is to get the power into their own hands, and to maintain it.

Power in itself, however, is neither moral nor non-moral. It's what men do with the power that they're able to gain. Many of us have known what happens when power gets into the hands of evil men. Now I pose for you the question: Do Christians ever bring to the world a picture of people who are powerful? Is this the image that the world gets of those of us who have embraced the Christian faith? - - that we are people who have unlimited spiritual resources? that we are people who are being empowered?

In the calendar of the Church today is Pentecost. And the Church does well to go on observing the Festival of Pentecost. In a very simple way let me tell you what Pentecost really was. It was a group of gathered people being empowered from on high - - further described as being God-possessed, spirit-filled, strengthened by something that they received - - human beings becoming the channels of God's grace, God's truth and God's power.

I'm not so sure that we talk enough about God's power. He is an almighty God. One of the descriptives that we first dealt with when years ago we used to talk about the atttibutes of God - -

> - - for shame upon the contemporary mood, when even the sophisticated ones hardly give Him the time of the day, to even ask what He's like - -

...but there was a time when people said, what is He like? And one of the things it seemed that they always would mention first -- He is omnipotent, He's the all-powerful.

The Day of Pentecost reminds us that a group of people had gathered together,

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barely a handful, I dare say, and were suddenly catapaulted onto the horizon, with a strength and a zeal that has changed the character of the world. Up to the time that this happened you have a right to see them as they were....

> ...they were crippled by fear. God has revealed Himself to them through Jesus Christ, appearance after appearance, but they were reluctant to tell anybody else, for fear that they wouldn't be understood, and also for fear of reprisal, because once upon a time they had been Jews, and now they would in a certain sense pit themselves against their own people by telling the good news that had come to them in Jesus Christ. They were crippled by this kind of fear. ...and they were also crippled because, for a while at least, they were overcome by their hostilities toward each other. You see, they had been followers of Jesus Christ. They were His disciples. But every single one of them faltered and failed in the school of discipleship. We use such classic words as deny, forsake, betray. When the chips were down, there wasn't a single one of them who measured up faithfully. . . .

Then what happened? Their friend, their master, the one concerning whom they had said such wonderful things - - and how they gave their pledge of allegiance.....after they had denied, forsaken, betrayed, He came back to them.

In a certain sense they were miserable failures, and there's one thing that usually happens when you're numbered among a people who are failures - - as soon as the ship begins to sink, it's a very natural thing to look around and

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blame one another. Take any group of society, as soon as the going is not as good as it ought to have been, guilt'stricken we look around and blame other people and find fault with them.

We have reason to believe that this was taking place among that band of disciples. At least it would be a very natural thing to assume. They were faulting one another . . .

> ...there's an interesting legend -- do you know -- that they used to say that whenever Peter would show up, in front of the disciples, after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that some people were downright mean and unkind, to go off at some short distance, and then make the sound of a rooster crowing....as much as to say, "For shame upon you, Peter -- you're the one who boasted that you'd never betray Jesus Christ, but you did."

...this human tendency always to fault other people - - it happened within a band of disciples. Take care that it doesn't happen in your circle.

Well, they were weak, because there was this element of hostility, because there was this element of fear. Then something happened.

The Scriptures say, "They were empowered by the Holy Spirit" - - they were God-possessed. In anticipation of this day, in my private devotions for the past week I have been reading again and again the entire Book of the Acts of the Apostles. It's a tremendous thing - - it's captivating, to see how a handful of people, empowered by God, went out and turned the world upside-down. They were getting into all kinds of trouble. They were always being attacked, being thrown in jail and out of jail. The amazing thing is, they never seemed to run out of steam, they kept to it.

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Now on this Day of Pentecost I ask you this: Why? How did it happen that they were empowered? Do you and I present to the world a picture of people who are being empowered? Do you and I present to the world a picture of people who are being made strong by resources upon which we can draw?

.....or do we present to the world a picture of the defeated,
and the forever frustrated?

We've thought this thing through rather carefully.

Today, during the 5:00 o'clock service when we confirm a group of eighth graders, we're introducing a new gesture. Properly understood, you can see the significance of it....

...the choir processes, as the members of the class tarry at the rear of the Nave at the crossing...

...once the choir is in the chancel, then the question will be put -- shall I put it in quotations? --"to the new group of recruits": What now do you honestly believe about Jesus Christ?

...collectively and with one voice they will answer, using Martin Luther's classic expression...

...having answered, then the choir alone will sing that great hymn of the Church "Come, Holy Spirit"...and the class processes, following their banner which they especially prepared and designed. But as they begin to process -- this is the significant thing -- the entire congregation will be asked to turn and face the confirmands in procession -- as a kind of welcoming gesture.....

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...for there are those who maintain today that Confirmation, properly understood, is young people identifying with the adult Christian community. If this gesture won't do anything for the confirmands, it ought to do something for us, to recognize the fact that we are part of the established community and now we are welcoming this group.

Why do I mention this to you?

I'm not so sure they may look into your faces. They may be a bit embarrassed and they'll look straight ahead, undoubtedly. But if they would look into our faces, what would they read? What would they see in us who have been Christians, now, a little bit longer than they? Would they find upon our faces traces of joy, and vitality? Would they read on our faces the fact that we are being empowered, that we are not a defeated people?

...I raise the question for what
it may be worth.

There are those who would destroy the Church for the simple reason that they know that it's the only powerful institution on the face of the earth through which God can work most effectively (I think it can be put that way) - - and through which God has seen fit to channel His grace and His truth. How did it happen at the beginning? Why were they the ones who were so empowered? I think there were three things that characterized their coming together, three conditions that had to be met before the gift of power came upon them.

One, they were obedient. Every single one who had gathered together was there because he remembered that Jesus Christ said, "Now you tarry in Jerusalem until the Spirit comes, and you will receive power." And they simply remembered what Jesus Christ had said.

This is why, with all the ardor of my soul, at whatever point I can impress

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someone who is young to begin by recognizing Jesus Christ as Lord and Master, because human nature is such that everyone's going to have a lord and a master. And as Jesus Christ becomes Lord and Master, then a man is in duty bound to obey Him....and as you read the entire New Testament you can be thrilled with the things that happened whenever people took Jesus Christ seriously and obeyed Him. The Church will continue to be weak until she learns all over again to allow Jesus Christ, as the great King and Head of the Church, to give the orders.

> ...but so often, you see, we're tempted to do it our way, to resolve it in our manner. Whenever there's a controversy, if someone can be in a vantage-point and look upon the two groups involved, he may discover far too often than he would care to admit a lack of willingness on the part of either group to rise above their point of view, and together to see it from God's point of view.

The second thing that characterized their coming together was the fact that they were all together in one place - - a spirit of unity characterized their coming together. They weren't faulting one another, they weren't shaking the finger at one another, they weren't trying to drive one another into a corner.

> ...they were converging, focusing on Jesus Christ, and this kind of unity characterized that group. There is always strength in unity, in diversity weakness, when not properly understood or expressed where a common effort is at stake.

The third thing: they came together and they expected God to do something. They knew that something was going to happen. They could no longer rely upon their own resources....

> ...I grieve about many things in our day, and there are some

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who take me to task for it because I don't want to be called a "gloomy preacher"....but I grieve a great deal because there are people who mean well, who try to reduce everything to the point of argument, and reason. And when they do this they run the risk of having done with the supernatural - - - you just can't take God out of the realm of the supernatural!

...these people who turned the world upside-down, to whom we will be forever in debt, were empowered because they expected something to happen, over and above their own strength and their limited vision and their futile efforts.

Some of us keep reminding the rest of us that we've got to go back and focus on that Day of Pentecost. We who are crippled by our weakness - - we can be made strong - - - whenever the conditions of the first Pentecost are met.

"When the day of Pentecost was fully come
they were all with one accord in one place
. . . they were all filled with the
Holy Ghost . . . "

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Communion Meditation - Pastor Shaheen
Trinity Sunday June 1, 1969

If the intellectuals and the sophisticated were to be allowed a kind of patron saint, Nicodemus might well be considered for that honor. He's the learned one, you may recall, who sought Jesus out at night in order to have a private conversation with Him. Selmer Norland read that for you as the choice of the alternate Gospel for this Trinity Sunday. There's no other page in the Bible quite like this night of encounter that took place between Jesus Christ and this very learned man.

He began in that very telling, even in indicting way, by declaring to Jesus Christ - - "We know . . . " - - and then repeatedly in the dialogue that followed he kept raising the question: "How can these things be?"

> ...this also reveals the kind of man that he was - - intellectual and sophisticated, the kind of a person, undoubtedly, who believed that nothing was to be accepted if you couldn't tie it up into a very neat formula, the kind of a person who honestly believed that if he was to follow any truth it had to be something that seemed intellectually respectable to him.....

....so he kept pressing the question: "How?"

Paul Scherer, prince among Lutheran pulpiteers of the past generation, once sized Nicodemus up in this way - - he's done it in a very masterful fashion. Let me read to you his exact words:

> "Nicodemus - - he knew too much. That's apparent to anybody who reads the story there in the third chapter of John. He was an expert. His specialty was religion, and he thought he knew all there was to know about it. He knew just what kind of person he was supposed to be. He had read about it in the books. As regards the technique of getting there,

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on that he was exceedingly well posted. The very first words he uttered, "Rabbi, we know - - " If you will follow it through after that you will find how necessary Jesus thought it was to shatter that false sense of security, that illusion of certainty, that self-complacent smugness into which this ruler of the Jews had fallen with his knapsack of knowledge . . "

As I survey the current scene, trying to read as much as I can about what's being said and what's being thought in today's world, I'm convinced that there are two things that ought to cause any of us a great deal of concern.

One is the laxity in our moral life. We've become so sophisticated, we've allowed ourselves to believe that anything can go. This laxity in our morality allows us also to believe that one doesn't need any particular kind of frame of moral reference, no one particular point of permanence. It's enough to frighten any man.

The second thing that causes me a great deal of concern, and maybe they're related, I'm not certain - - - our lost sense of wonder, the element of mystery is fast disappearing from our life. Who goes out now and gazes upon the heavens and stands in complete awe? Did I not hear one of you parents tell me how 'shook-up' you were by the reply of one of your children when you said, "Come, look - - it's a moon-shot in color this time!" - - only to have your youngster reply, "It was on yesterday. I saw it then."

...it's a tragic thing when people go through life no longer on tiptoe.

It's a tragic thing when people go through life no longer being overwhelmed with the sense of awe and majesty about anything that God has done. There was a time when as a boy I used to say,

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are - - - "

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...what do they say now?

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star -
We know exactly what you are:
You're just combusting, so much mess,
Carbon, nitrogen and hydrogen gas."

The star is so much more than that!

Why do I talk to you in this way?

I'm fully cognizant that today there are boys and girls coming to receive the Sacrament of the Altar for the first time. In the more than three decades of teaching catechetical classes I know full well that I have never been able to explain to anyone's intellectual satisfaction the meaning of the Sacrament. It used to puzzle me a great deal, because I thought it was something that had to be fully understood, and that maybe no one had a right to come and receive the Sacrament unless he could feel that he fully understood what it meant.

I'm not as troubled now as I once was, because I've also come to realize that I've never been able to fully explain to anyone's intellectual satisfaction the fact of God! - - the meaning of God. But in this day and age, when for many people their forte is science, and their folly is their omniscience - - this emphasis on being ableto say, "I know....and if I don't know it I won't believe it, and I won't accept it until it seems reasonable to me - - " ....curse be upon us. This is not to say that none of us ever fully appreciates the giant strides that have been made in the improvement of our economic and social order, and our way of life, thanks to those who are very learned, and very scientific.

But a word of caution is absolutely necessary. Because we've become an expert with the test-tube, and because we're exceptionally skilled on the drawing board, this in itself never qualifies a man to speak authoritatively on the

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things of life itself, and the fact of God. For ultimately life maintains the element of the mysterious. This is one reason why my years have taught me to shy away from those who feel as though they have to learn so much about sex, when the beauty and the mystery of sex is tied up with the beauty and the mystery of life itself, even as it's tied up with the beauty and the mystery of love. Said Albert Einstein, "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. The man to whom this emotion is a stranger, the man who can no longer pause to wonder and to stand in rapt awe is as good as dead - - his eyes are closed."

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Quite frankly, I'm fully aware of the fact that the boys and girls that I've been privileged to meet with in anticipation of their Confirmation Day come now at one of these services to receive the Holy Communion. It's enough for me to know that if, figureatively speaking, I can lead them with my hand into the shadow of an altar, and there, if you please, by the demeanor of my soul, to enable them to approach with reverence - - not to fully understand what's taking place, but to have a sense of mystery and awe at this God who is wonderful enough and great enough to humble Himself, to come into my cleansed sinner's heart - - if they can be made aware of this element of reverence and awe, then we have served them well.

I am absolutely confident that when our Blessed Lord first served the Sacrament, that that band of disciples couldn't possibly understand, to their intellectual satisfaction, what this carpenter's-son-turned-preacher quite meant when He said, "It's body, and it's blood - - but it's My body, and it's My blood, and I give it for you." I find some sense of gratification in remembering that intellectual giant of American Christendom, Reinhold Niebuhr, when he was gravely ill, returned to church, and the first thing that he wanted to do was not so much

to hear a sermon, but to receive the Holy Communion. For in the Sacrament there still remained, over and above him, that tremendous truth which he still couldn't quite figure out, yet it was enough to make him kneel, and to bow his head,

...to turn his back upon the altar and go out with a

spring in his step and a song in his heart.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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To you who are being recognized as graduating seniors this year, the church does not ignore the fact that there is no more important graduation experience in your life than the one in which you are about to participate. No other graduation, no matter how far you may go on in the academic world, can quite match this one. The church very properly takes note of this and this is why, despite the fact that there may not be general baccalaureate services being held in academic communities this year, at least in this area, we have seen fit to invite you to come to your church, where for the most part those now numbered in this group have stood within the shadow of this altar and made your profession of faith in Jesus Christ. It's in His name that we ask you now to share this service.

What have I to say to you on this occasion?

I am constrained to talk to you about a young man who lived a number of centuries ago. He was a carpenter's son who happened to turn out to become a preacher. He turned His back upon that carpenter's shop in Nazareth, and then spent a significant period of His life in prayerful reflection. One day He returned to His home town, and as His custom was, He went to church, participated in the service, and He had something to say. Let me read for you the Scriptural account of that occasion:

> "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.
> And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,
> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because

> he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to
> the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-
> hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives,
> and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at
> liberty them that are bruised,
> To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.
> And he closed the book, and he gave it again to
> the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all
> them that were in the synagogue were fastened
> on him.
> And he began to say unto them, This day is this
> scripture fulfilled in your ears."

You see, it happened this way. After He had been in the carpenter's shop for a while He decided to leave home. Just where He went I can't tell you, but I think I am in a position to tell you that in the years that elapsed something happened to Him which made all the difference in the world in His life. And because of that difference it's made all the difference in the world for everybody else who has ever come to know anything at all about Him.

Just when it happened I can't quite tell you. But when He turned His back upon that carpenter's shop He did a great deal of thinking. Now this is the first thing that I bring to your attention: Take time to think, reflectively.

The unfortunate thing about the world into which you and I have been born is, it's a world that brings pressure upon us, any number of activities always demanding our attention. Why, I even remember some nineteen years ago, back there in that parish in South Williamsport, Pennsylvania, a youngster barely 12 or 13 years of age came down from Cobbleskill, New York, to visit his grandparents. He was a very likeable chap, and I coveted for myself a chance of just talking with the youngster, and I said to him, "Maybe you'll stop by the Parsonage sometime, or maybe I can stop by at your grandparents',

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and we can talk a bit." And he immediately responded, "Well, we've got a lot of things to do, I'll have to check my schedule first." - - 12 or 13 years of age, nineteen years ago.....with the pressure of so many things...."I'll have to check my schedule first." This is typical of your life - - you're never at a want to find some place to go, you're never at a want to find something to do.

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But this can be a liability. Despite all the pressure of life upon you, there is need to take time to think. This is what this carpenter's son was able to do. I remember on occasion when Mrs. Shaheen and I have time to look back over the days of our years, she recalls with a great deal of nostalgia how when she went to a one-room country school, and when the bell was rung for dismissal, she walked all the way home, and tripped through the meadows, figuratively speaking, and as she did so she was able to reflect, and to think. She was able even to utilize, in an unhurried way, that period of time <u>just to think.</u>

A price that we pay for this wonderful civilization of ours is that we have so little time to think reflectively. I am absolutely convinced that this young man of whom I speak now, who lived some two thousand years ago, had plenty of time to think reflectively. There is no Scriptural account of what happened in the life of Jesus Christ from the time He was twelve years of age and appeared in the Temple to the time that He began His ministry, but one can honestly conclude that they were not idle years. What was Jesus Christ doing from the age of twelve to thirty? Whatever else He was doing, He most certainly was thinking - - - so much so that when He began His ministry He was able to stand up and in no uncertain way say, "This is what I'm going to

do - - - this is what I'm going to make of my life."

The unique thing about life is that God doesn't deal in duplicates. There isn't another single person on the face of this earth who is exactly as you are. Whatever else I know about the nature and the character of God, I'm convinced that God exercises a kind of economy, and when God makes an investment He wants a return. You have been taught to believe, and properly so, that your life is a gift from God. The indelible stamp of God is upon your life. If your baptism means anything at all, that's what your baptism means - - that you're signed and sealed with God's mark. What God has given to you He has not given precisely to anybody else. The gift of life we may share in common, but the name-tag that's attached to your life He has not attached to anybody else. You have a right to see it in that focus.

Undoubtedly this is the way Jesus Christ reasoned with His life. The only life that He had was His own, and somewhere along the line it occurred to Him He would make the most of it...somewhere along the line, if I may put it for you in this way, it was made absolutely plain to Him that His life would be held accountable by God.

I hope you won't shy away from that. Some of you will be going to colleges and institutions of higher learning. You will encounter professors, very learned men, whose store-house of knowledge may be far greater than all of ours put together, and they will make light of much that you've been taught. In one way or another they may try to erase from your mind the fact of God. Now there is nothing at all new about this. It's been going on since the world began. There are always those who have made light of the fact of God. I would remind you that the one person who has transformed the face of the earth, more than

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anybody else, made much of the fact of God. And there are those, agnostics even, who while they will not call Jesus Christ Lord and Saviour nor Master, yet there are any number of them who will honestly admit that there was never anyone quite like Jesus Christ. I would remind you - - He made much of the fact of God.

Bear me out now, will you, patiently, while I recite it for you.....

...the word had gone out throughout the whole community, "He's back! - -He's back! He's come home! -- the carpenter's son -- and somebody said he was heading for the synagogue." So there was more than the usual amount of people in church that night. People looking in from the outside, there they could spot him. They'd say, "Why, I'd recognize him anywhere. He looks exactly like Joseph."

...the service began. The presiding officer, at a particular point in the service, said something like this: "As you know, our custom is to have somebody read from the prophets. We're delighted to have a distinguished visitor here in our midst today. He's been away from our community for some time, but now he's returned. He's Joseph's son. Jesus, would you like to read the lessons for us today."

...and in much of the same spirit, perhaps, as Chuck Oglebay reflected, he got up from where he was, went over to the sacred stand, reached for the sacred writings, and read from the Good Book.

...then something very unusual happened - - he sat down. And that was a signal to all the congregation, according to the custom of the synagogue, that he had something to say. What was it that

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he had to say? He said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, and this day this scripture is being fulfilled in your ears." - - - he laid out in one grand swell stroke in that service his mission in life, and the kind of thing that he felt constrained to accomplish. He began, mark you, by saying, "God's compelling me to do this. God is motivating me to say to you what I am going to say."

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If you were to ask me, my friend, what I covet for you more than anything else, I would honestly say that I would covet for you more than anything else the ability to be able to say, in the spirit of Jesus Christ, at some juncture-point in your life, that what I am going to make of my life I am going to make in God's name. That's exactly what Jesus Christ was saying! - - from this point on, anything and everything that I'm going to do I'm going to do because God is constraining me, God is motivating me.

I'm absolutely convinced that anyone who has ever made his mark in history has been a kind of a person who has been able to feel that he has been dynamically motivated by a force and a power over and above himself. And Christians have a way of putting their fingers to their lips reverently and saying, "It's God."

You notice, I said I covet this for you, because I'm very sorry to admit that any number of people that I seem to meet in the course of life are people who seem to lack this God-motivating force in their lives. One of the privileges that comes to me occasionally is to go out and address meetings of pastors as they have their conventions, and they tell me that there is an increasing number of men who are demitting the Ministry. This bothers me a great

deal, and I am constrained to tell them that for any man who wants to serve in the Ministry there must always be the compelling force that God is motivating him, that this thing he is doing he is doing because God is directing him.

But you know, if you know anything at all about church history, that this isn't something unique for preachers. Bless Martin Luther's soul, Martin Luther gave us to fully understand that anyone who is a Christian should look upon his day's work as something that's being motivated by God. You've heard me say it, haven't you -- Martin Luther used to say that even the cobbler who repaired shoes, and did so because he had a concern for the physical well-being of his customers, did a work as sacred in God's sight as the priest who stood with folded hands in prayer before the altar. I'm pleading with you to keep evidenced in your life the God-element.

The second thing that occurs to me as I read the Scripture lesson, that Jesus Christ said this is a personal program. He said, "I can't speak for anybody else" (if I may read between the lines)...."I can't talk for my cousins, I can't talk for my brothers, my sisters, I can't talk for anybody else. But I must talk for myself." .....and eventually each one of you may find yourself at a moment in life when you've got to speak for yourself. And I ask you to remember the pattern of the man from Nazareth.

And the next thing that needs to be said immediately is this man from Nazareth was a man for others. When He laid out his personal program, He had everybody else in the world in mind, and every single phase of social welfare, meeting the needs of the deprived and the disadvantaged, Jesus Christ struck because it was in His own personal program. I am amazed and amused sometimes at people in our generation who seem to believe that this whole thing of

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involvement and becoming relevant is something that they've discovered. It's as old as Jesus Christ himself. And the dent that He wanted to make in life He wanted to make because He wanted to help other people. Now if you want an acid test, a good criteria, as to the integrity of your life's work, just simply ask yourself: Will anybody else be better off because of what I am doing?

The years passed. Jesus Christ only had three years in which to fulfill what He had in mind. I don't know how many years God's going to give you. I haven't the slightest notion. I would wish for each of you a wonderful fulfillment, to live out the days of your prime and to come to the days of your autumn. But I have no guarantee. Jesus Christ had only three years.

He did so well that one time somebody sent word to Him, "Tell us, are you really God's special one? Are you really the Messiah?" And what was He able to answer? -- simply by saying: "All I can show you is what I've done. Let my record speak for itself -- the blind receive their sight, the lame have been healed, the poor have had the gospel preached to them".....that was Jesus Christ's glorious way of saying, "All I can tell you, that there are people whose lot in life has been improved because of what I have been doing."

And now the third thing that needs to be observed, that when Jesus Christ lined up for Himself a personal program, it did not simply remain an abstract, or an idea. He immediately, figuratively speaking, rolled up His sleeves and went to work. Everything that He said ought to be done He Himself began to do. Some of you may be caught up with the college age students and the youth of the land who have become very ~~impressed~~ impatient with what's happening in the world. You may become so impatient that you will denounce, you may even become caught up with some people who would want to destroy. I too become impatient. I become

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terribly impatient with people who can say nothing but derogatory remarks. All of us are so stained by human sin that none of us at any age has ever done a perfect job. Anybody can say what's wrong. But in the spirit of Jesus Christ, I beg you to begin at once where you are with what you have to improve the situation. And just don't shout negative things. The world steps aside for the person who is willing to do something constructive. This may be the challenge that God brings to you.

Now I have one closing thing to say to you. I would encourage you to think in terms of your life by recognizing ten-year intervals. Undoubtedly Jesus Christ knew that He only had three years, and He felt constrained to do what had to be done in that period of time. It may be a fanciful thing, but why don't you, as you go through life, plot your life in terms of ten-year intervals, and keep saying to yourself, what will be the nature and character of my life, what will be the extent of my contribution to society, by the time the next decade is over? Within ten years from now, you may be twenty-eight, ask now the question: What ought you to have done by that time? Then at twenty-eight, ask yourself, what ought I to have done by the time I reach thirty-eight? I suggest that as a rule of life.

Mrs. Shaheen and I, some nineteen years ago, decided to build for ourselves a little place in the hills. We began in a very rough way. We knew full well that according to the money that we might have and the years that God would give us, we'd try to finish it and complete it over a period of years. The very first summer that we used it we had nothing but bare partition and no doors, roof over the head and the floor. That was it.

But I shall not forget, I hope I will always remember, that when the man came to lay the cinder-block, when the electrician came to string out the wire,

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when the carpenter came to put in the jamb, when the plumber came to plot out his work.....every single one of them to a man said to us, "Just how do you plan to finish this house?"

> ...the carpenter wanted to know, because how much width should he allow when he put in the jamb? and for the window frame? The electrician had to know, because how much wire should he allow? Would the walls be given a skim coat of plaster on the cinder-block, or would it be drywall construction beyond that? or would there be paneling?

...all of these things entered into it, and out of their experience they brought to us, the neophytes, the important question: How do you plan to finish it?

I, who have lived longer than I have yet to live, - - I, who by the grace of God have been allowed enough time to be your father, pose for you the question as you begin the living out of the days of your years: Keep in mind how you want your life to finish. Soren Kierkegaard, bless his soul, has said something terribly profound when he observed that life has to be lived looking forward, but it can only be understood as we look backward. Keep in mind the historical perspective, the spot in the future when you can look back and recall the meaning of those years - - - today is ours only because God has tomorrow in mind.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Second Sunday After Trinity June 15, 1969

"BREAD BEGGARS"
(Luke 11:5-13)

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It was only rarely, like when we were shooting marbles on the other side of the house, that it wasn't until we heard Carlton's grandfather stomping along on that section of boardwalk on the front of the vacant lot that we realized that we were hungry. Part of the after-school ritual, for at least two of us boys who grew up in that small town, was to wait for pink-faced, white-haired John Shaffer to come home from work. He was a section hand, and we'd wait for him as he came from the railroad tracks at the far end of town. I can see him now as he came trudging along, swinging by his side that metal -- tin it was, lunch bucket....and when we got near to him, he'd toss it into our hands. Then we'd look for the precious reserved morsels.

He was Carlton's grandfather. In my little world, in my growing years, I was denied a grandfather. So I laid a claim-of-sorts upon Carlton's grandfather. Sometimes I caught the lunch bucket, sometimes Carlton did, but like as not, throughout the course of the day, when John Shaffer sat down to eat his lunch, he always remembered two hungry boys, which means he never completely emptied the lunch pail. What would it be this time?

...the remnant of a gingerbread cake? .....might it be
one of the two molasses cookies he started out with
in the morning? ....or would it be something as simple
as a bread-and-butter sandwich?

....whatever it was, as I recall it now, no food perhaps ever tasted as good

as what we hungry youngsters took from John Shaffer's dinner pail.

As I look back across the years, we were beggars, that's what we were, shameless, unabashed - - - we knew only one thing: he was a kind and gracious grandfather, and he kept something for us, and we begged it, we got it.

Allow yourself now, will you, and quite properly so, the use of a sanctified imagination. Go back through the corridors of time.....

....picture as best you can that other small town called Nazareth.
There's a carpenter's son, dark-skinned, dark-eyed, dark-haired.
He's coming back, now, from having delivered the doorsill that
Joseph had made for the farmer who lived at the far end of town..
...and as He comes back, errand having been performed, He goes
into that simple house in Nazareth and cries out - - "Mom, I'm hungry!
- - you got anything to eat?"

Surely growing boys are growing boys the world over, and at any period in time.....and I can picture Him: "Mom, I'm hungry"

...for there are always
those in-between-meal hunger pangs that just have
to be satisfied.

And when you went into that home in Nazareth you can be sure of at least three different types of goodies - - a simple loaf of bread...or a dried fish... ...or an egg. He also had been warned that He had to be very careful because He had to distinguish them from other things that looked very much like them: a stone could very easily resemble the type of bread that they had in those days; a snake could very easily resemble a dried fish; and a scorpian could

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very easily resemble an egg. But as He recalled the days of His youth, never did His father or His mother trick Him by giving Him one of these. It was always to the larder that He could go, and His hunger pangs could be satisfied.

Jesus Christ of course never forgot the days of His youth, and every now and then when people would crowd around Him asking Him to tell them stories, to paint such magnificent word pictures of truth, He'd reach back into those other years, and draw upon something exceedingly precious by which He could weave for them a marvelous tale that pointed up the fundamental truths of the Kingdom of God. This sermon today and the one next Sunday will be the last in the series that was begun last September, when for the most part the sermons to be preached from the pulpit this year would be based upon the parables of our Lord.

In my study, in preparation for this series, I'm amazed to discover how seldom Jesus told a story about prayer. He did pray a great deal, as you know, it was the natural quality of His life. And I think there are only two stories that He ever told that point up a lesson on prayer. Now, reminiscent of the days of His youth, when people crowd around Him for Him to tell them some wonderful thing, He spoke to them in this manner -- you'll find it recorded in the 11th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, and this is the way it begins, with the 5th verse:

> "And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves;
> For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?
> And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed: I cannot rise and give thee.

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> I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.
> And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.
> For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.
> If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?
> Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?
> If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

So Jesus remembers the need for bread. Jesus remembers the basic nature and character of His own parents as that need is satisfied. Now He's talking to them about prayer, and one of the most wonderful lessons that He ever taught.

I'm convinced as you wrestle with this in your pilgrimage through life, that we don't always clearly understand this whole matter of prayer. It's amazing how long we can go through life with mistaken notions. As I deal with this parable maybe I can suggest some guidelines that may help you in your prayer life.

To begin with, whoever would pray must have a clear understanding as to the nature and character of God. Carlton and I never hesitated to run down the street and meet his grandfather, because we knew exactly what his grandfather was like. He was a kind and a gracious soul, who always had something to give us. Our need at that moment could be met by him, and he did not fail us. We could go to him shamelessly, with complete abandon, recklessly, unafraid. So Jesus in this parable points up for us the nature and the character of God - - He's to be approached. He will not give to us reluctantly.

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Jesus delineates for us in this parable the householder who is disturbed one night. If you've traveled in Palestine you know that most people live in a single-room house, and everybody sleeps on the floor in that single room. And when the door is closed at night, that means, Don't bother us — we're set for the night. And if a man had a whole brood of children, he especially didn't want to be bothered, because goodness knows how long it would take to get them settled again, once they were awakened. And also if they would be disturbed -- there in the winter months livestock would be brought in to shelter them on the cold night, and also that they might benefit from the body heat of the animals - - - he didn't want them disturbed, either.....

> ...and Jesus said, a man came because he had received unexpected guests in the night. Perhaps they were traveling, completing their journey in the cool of the night rather than the heat of the day, but at any rate they came unexpectedly. And mid-Eastern hospitality dictates that you always give them something to eat as soon as they arrive. In his situation, for which he was unprepared, he comes now and he hammers away at this man's door .....and reluctantly the man on the inside gives him bread -- to get rid of him.....

Now, Jesus says, if a human being can satisfy the need of another human being, how much more might you be able to expect that God will satisfy your need?

It's not blasphemy to think in these terms - - there was the Norseman buried in a Scotland graveyard who had chosen for his epitaph:

> "Here lies I, Martin Elginbrodde;
> Have mercy on my soul, Lord God,
> As I would, were I Lord God,
> And you were Martin Elginbrodde."

.....one moves from that point, you see: if we can be charitably inclined toward one another, why can't we believe, then, that God even more so will deal graciously with us? He is no reluctant giver. So now when we do approach God, how shall we approach Him? Carlton and I approached his grandfather shamelessly. In much the same spirit we ought to approach God. For every single one of us in God's sight remains a beggar, and we ought to acknowledge our condition. It is what we don't have that prompts us to go to Him who is the giver of all good.

When Carlton and I went to his grandfather, we made no pretense. We went exactly as we were....we were that honest, whether we knew it or not. Martin Luther lays down a ground rule for praying:

"Don't lie to God. Be honest with Him."

I'm not so sure that you and I are always honest with God. Sometimes we can wax hypocritical even when we go into God's presence. But if I know anything at all about God, I think there is one thing that He won't tolerate, and that is our dishonesty. This He cannot stand. So we must come, shamelessly as is our condition.

Augustine, bless his soul, one of the great early Church fathers, has written his Confessions -- not easy to read, rather ponderous. But quite incidentally I would remind you that he'd been quite a reprobate. You name the sin -- he'd experienced it. But he was converted, converted largely through the prayers of Monica, his mother, who never gave up. And likewise in his Confessions he makes reference to the fact that one teacher who paid attention to him as a person, and this was like a redeeming touch upon Augustine, the reprobate.

But what I wanted to tell you was that somewhere in his Confessions you

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can read that Augustine tells how honest he was with God. He was so stained by original sin, but when he was very good, he sort of pitied himself, because he did enjoy being bad! - - and he delighted in hisssins. And at the same time, when he was bad, he did have his moments, when he wanted to be good...and he tells us in his Confessions that he used to pray:

"Dear God, make me pure -- but not tonight!"

Perchance when we're honest with ourselves, that's the way we come into God's presence. One of the ground rules for praying, then, is to be absolutely honest. The man who came to the householder knew only one thing: he didn't have bread -- and he didn't much care for anything else -- so he kept clamoring and hammering away. He was that honest with himself.

The second ground-rule, I think, is to recognize the situation in which you find yourself, and to realize that perhaps the situation may not be changed - - but you and I need to be changed in order to meet the situation...

...and how do you and I pray?

"O God, don't let the biopsy read the way it's going to read -- make the medical report a mistake, God!"

...but cancer is cancer, and even God can't change cancer.

...sometimes we pray to God and ask Him to uproot us from our present situation and take us somewhere else....

...but God doesn't do it.

...sometimes the situation in which we find ourselves is of our own creating.....

...the householder knew only one thing: his pantry was bare - - he had to meet the situation that existed, and so as he prayed, as he begged, he got bread....but he had to go beg for it.

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If he'd had his choice, perhaps he'd much preferred not to have had the guests come at all. Maybe it was a relative, the last person in the world that he wanted to see. But the situation was as it was. So when you and I pray we can learn a lesson from this parable on praying: We must ask God to enable us to meet the situation.

Last summer I found an old tin lunch bucket. I have it to this day in my study. Occasionally when the sermon comes poorly and with great effort, I just stop, and I look around the walls in my study, and the floor, and this place and that place.....and my mind is refreshed, stimulated all over again.

...there's the tin lunch bucket that reminded me of two boys, who shamelessly begged for bread, and of a kind and gracious soul who kept back enough - - he always had enough for two hungry lads.....

Dare I tell you that God is like that -- only more so! - - a thousand times more so, and as we beg, shamelessly, He supplies our need.

But I warn you - - unlike Carlton's grandfather, who never held us responsible for what we did with our unbounded energy that was replenished anew by the morsels from the lunch pail, God, I think, does hold us responsible.....for when God supplies our need He empowers us that we might become channels of blessing to other people.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Third Sunday After Trinity June 22, 1969

"BANQUET GIVER"
(Luke 14:15-24)

Someone put on my desk last Monday morning the feature article in the magazine section of the Washington Star. The subject dealt with is a well-known news analyst and commentator. His two-minute commentaries are exceedingly perceptive and his style and his spirit are equally distinctive. The writer of the article dubs the North Dakota native as a "Brooding Optimist" -- a very apt descriptive, I suggest to you. For as I understand life in these days, no one really is made equal to it unless he does become a brooding optimist.....which is simply to say, to take life seriously, but never without hope. Now that takes a bit of doing.

In a reflective moment now, let me ask you, what kind of person do you think Jesus Christ really was, that is, what manner of man? When God saw fit to send Him to this earth, what characterized His mind, what characterized His spirit?

> ...there are people who walk into your presence who cast a pall upon us -- it's as though somebody were dampening our spirit. They only have to appear -- sometimes not so much as say a single word, and we become depressed, we even find ourselves with hostile feelings arising within us....
> ...on the other hand, there are those who have only to walk into a room, and it's as though the night suddenly has become the dawn -- they have a transforming quality that makes things bright.....

I think Jesus Christ was that manner of man. As He tiptoed through life in that pilgrimage which was assigned to Him, I think no matter where He went

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He brought a measure of cheer and joy.

Now let it be understood at once - - never a matter of flippancy, but of cheer, and of joy, as He brooded seriously upon everything in this world that was linked up with eternity. He, too, I submit to you, could be characterized as the "brooding optimist," who took life so seriously that He honestly believed that no matter what happened, there would always remain the positive note.

So frequently Jesus Christ tried to establish in men's minds exactly what God is like. Occasionally He told stories, and the purpose of any story that He told was always to reveal the nature and character of His Heavenly Father. Today, in this, what could be perhaps the final in the series of sermons dealing with the parables that Jesus taught, we come face to face with another interpretation that He gave of the basic nature and character of God.

It happened in a very interesting way. He was invited out to eat. And while He was there He discovered that some of the people at the table were far more concerned with their own status than they were with anything else. And then somebody at the table made a rather embarrassing remark. Now usually there is in any group that socially useful person who very quickly changes the subject of conversation, in his attempt to take the host and the embarrassed guests off the hook. This type of person was present, and he said some kind of a pious platitude, high-sounding phrase, that really didn't mean too much - but a rather extravagant gesture, like: "Wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to eat in the kingdom of God?"

Jesus retorted immediately. In a kind of unpremeditated way He turned

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and said to this person, "Do you really think so?" - - it was in this manner that He spoke - - - "Let me tell you something. If you really were invited, do you honestly believe that you'd take advantage of the invitation?"

...in a classic way let me read to you the Scriptural account of His words, recorded as the 14th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, beginning with the 15th verse:

> "And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.
> Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many:
> And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.
> And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.
> And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.
> And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.
> So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.
> And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.
> And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.
> For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper."

Jesus now is interpreting the nature and character of God for us.

It's a very salutary thing to notice that in this instance He again strikes the positive note. There's nothing restrictive, at the beginning here, in His understanding of what God is like. It's a very positive thing. He said God is like a banquet giver. God isn't asking, at the beginning,

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anything of anybody. God is giving, God is providing, God is stretching out His hand and He says, "Here it is. Come and get it."

I don't know where you begin with your notion of God, but a lot of people never begin at that point, and it's a pity. This grand and glorious God of ours as revealed through the Scriptures is like a banquet giver, who gets everything ready and spreads a table and says, "Now come on." He's the optimist who believes that you have only to extend the invitation and people will be delighted to respond.

Well, what happened?

According to the story that Jesus told, the people invited just didn't respond. So now put the two together: everything is made ready -- gladly and graciously -- and then a poor response. This is why you can say God is like a brooding optimist - - - - He expects that people might respond, but when they don't He takes it very seriously.

In the Anglican Church they too have their Catechism. Somewhere in the development of their Catechism they developed a series of three concentric circles. The first circle represents the universe; the inner, or middle circle, represents the Family of Man; the central circle, the one completely on the inside, represents the Church, the fellowship of believers in the redeemed society. Look at it this way, will you, for the balance of the sermon.

God is the great Giver, who makes everything ready that we ought to have. He created the world. This is our Scriptural understanding of the universe, and we're absolutely fascinated, with all of our scientific learning, when we go back to that first chapter in the Bible, "In the beginning - -" - - to realize that even that expression represents millions of years by which

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God was perfectly content to get the world ready for us, to give concern to every significant detail, the net result would be a vast botanical and zoological garden called the Earth -- the land of bounty and of beauty. God says, "I've made it ready. I stretch out my hand, I give it to you."

....He's the optimist who honestly believes that there will be those who will appreciate the good earth.

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Then, having done this, this God who thinks of everything, when He gets ready for us, has the Family of Man in mind - - He comes now to creating a human being. God thought of the human race, God thought of man as the crowning of all His creation. When you and I come into this world, there's the whole human race, the Family of Man, waiting to receive us -- people waiting to love us, people waiting to be loved. You see, this is what the Christian Church is trying to say to people constantly. Will you look at it this way.

Oh, I'll grant you, there's much that's sordid and there's much that's ugly, and even within the human race you can find a Judas Iscariot. I know all of that. But written largely upon the face of the earth is the imprimatur of one who remains the brooding optimist, and every now and then you find someone who responds.

Emphasize it well, she was young....could be of today's generation. This was her reading of life, this was her reading of the human race. What a healthy, salutary thing against so much that we sense and perceive on the horizon today. Don't mark it off as just being ideally romantic, so much dreamer stuff, so much poetry; the human spirit needs the poetic quality. This is

what she said:

> "Up went the curtain on the world. And what a world! I loved it at first sight - - and plunged into it head foremost. There was no ice to break. The water was warm, and I was swimming."

God thought of the human race with all of its exceedingly fine qualities. He honestly believed that there would be those who would appreciate it.

And then God-who-thinks-of-everything thought of Jesus Christ, thought of the company of the redeemed, thought, if you please, of the inner circle of the elect, the chosen ones. You and I did not create the Church. This is the glorious fruit of the Holy Spirit. You and I -- let's read it properly -- have not come here on our own momentum. We've been <u>called</u>, we've been gathered by the Holy Spirit that draws us together. You and I did not create the Church - - - we were born into it through our baptism...This wonderful Company of the Redeemed, in which every single one of us is given the golden opportunity to come into his full maturity in Jesus Christ.

With all the ardor of my soul I honestly believe that a man who has not known Jesus Christ is less than what God intended him to be. God-who-thinks-of-everything spreads before us the Christian Church, in which you and I are given the opportunity to grow, to develop and to mature. He honestly believes that there will be those of us who will <u>respond</u> to what He puts in front of us. He is the <u>optimist</u>, He is the banquet giver, who stretches out His hand and says, "Here it is - - - take it!"

But then there are those who do not respond. And I picture God, then, brooding over this terrible fact.....not that He should become the disappointed

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host, but that those who would not come would deny themselves so great a blessing. When the future historian-philosopher of the world will write the final chapter of Man, I think he may have to say:

"Then there was the good God who freely offered
His best.....but the tragedy is, there were
those who never took advantage of what He gave . . . . "

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles June 29, 1969

"FIVE - TWO - ONE"
(Matthew 25:14-30)

Today's sermon is the last in the series begun last September. You may remember that for the most part the sermons being preached from this pulpit have dealt with the parables taught by our Blessed Lord. Significantly enough, the one that's reserved for this last Sunday is perhaps one of the most popular of all the parables that He ever spoke, one of the most difficult, however, to understand.

But before anything else is said concerning a parable, let us remind ourselves that the basic question for most people is not: Is there a God? The vital question for many people is: What is He like? It could be that no matter where you may go on the face of this earth, that you will always find someone who, no matter how reluctantly, will admit that there is Someone or Something over and above himself. I honestly believe that there is no such thing as an atheist. There may be times and seasons in his life when he may not in all honesty brand himself as an atheist. But life itself has a way of bringing every man to his knees, if not in adoration, then most certainly in submission. For the forces of life do overwhelm us. Now it could be that most people on the face of this earth will not do as you and I do in acknowledgment of this Force, or this Power -- reverently put fingers to one's lips and whisper the name GOD. Yet there will be the recognition.

So the question remains, not: Is there a God? But rather, What's He like? God, knowing this characteristic of human nature, is a God who is always revealing Himself. This is the primary reason why we have the Scriptures,

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that through the Scriptures we might come to know God. As you turn the pages of the Old Testament you have one revelation after another....and then when you come to the New Testament -- how fortunate we are, and the full, final and complete revelation of God is made. As Martin Luther once said, "It is the Bible that leads us to Jesus Christ." It was the Apostle Paul who in writing his letters to Christians who lived in Colossae said in one magnificant sentence, referring of course to Jesus Christ: "In him all the fulness of God is pleased to dwell."

Jesus Christ came teaching and preaching, and always with one thing in mind, to tell people what the Kingdom of God is like, what God is like. They put the question to Him. A group of disciples came one day and they even went so far as to say, "Jesus, if you can just tell us what God is like, if you'll tell us, we'll be satisfied." And Jesus said what no one else has ever dared to say: "Whoever has seen me has seen God."

> ...so Jesus Christ came, not only as the self-revelation of all the fulness of God, He also came teaching and preaching, wherever there was an audience to whom He could speak.....He would weave magnificant tales about the Kingdom of God, and the central thrust in the telling of His story would be that they might get some wonderful idea of what the Kingdom is like.

The parable that we're studying today, in this the last of the series of the sermons, is recorded in the 25th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew. It's referred to with a number of different titles:

> ...sometimes it's called the Parable of the Talents...
>
> ...sometimes it's designated as the Parable of the Pounds....

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...most recently I've seen it referred to as the

Parable of the Three Servants....

Let me read it for you in a contemporary translation - - remember now, He's talking about the Kingdom of God and drawing for them some unforgettable picture of the nature and character of God himself. . . .

"It - - " (referring to the Kingdom of God) "It will be like a man who was about to leave home on a trip: he called his servants and put them in charge of his property. He gave to each one according to his ability: to one he gave five thousand dollars, to the other two thousand dollars, and to the other one thousand dollars. Then he left on his trip. The servant who had received five thousand dollars went at once and invested his money and earned another five thousand dollars. In the same way the servant who received two thousand dollars earned another two thousand dollars. But the servant who received one thousand dollars went off, dug a hole in the ground, and hid his master's money.

'After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them. The servant who had received five thousand dollars came in and handed over the other five thousand dollars. 'You gave me five thousand dollars, sir,' he said. 'Look! Here are another five thousand dollars that I have earned.' 'Well done, good and faithful servant!' said his master. 'You have been faithful in managing small amounts, so I will put you in charge of large amounts. Come on in, and share my happiness!' Then the servant who had been given two thousand dollars came in and said, 'You gave me two thousand dollars, sir. Look! Here are another two thousand dollars that I have earned.' 'Well done, good and faithful servant!' said his master. 'You have been faithful in managing small amounts, so I will put you in charge of large amounts. Come on in and share my happiness!'

Then the servant who had received one thousand dollars came in and said: 'Sir, I know you *are* a hard man: you reap harvests where you did not plant, and gather crops where you did not scatter seed. I was afraid, so I went off and hid your money in the ground. Look! Here is what belongs to you.' 'You bad and lazy servant! his master said. 'You knew, did you, that I reap harvests where I did not plant, and gather crops where I did not scatter seed? Well, then, you should have deposited my money in the bank, and I would have received it all back with interest when I returned. Now, take the money away from him and give it to the one who has ten thousand dollars. For to every one who has, even more will be given, and he will have more than enough; but the one who has nothing, even the little he has will be taken away from him. As for this useless servant -- throw him outside in the darkness; there he will cry and gnash his teeth.'"

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Now don't forget, Jesus was telling this story to remind people of the nature and the character of God. The outstanding character in the story is the property owner who comes back and takes an accounting.

I suppose when you and I read this story we draw a measure of comfort in recognizing that some people are better off then we are because they had a better start...

> ...many a man cherishes this story of the Talents because he can excuse himself. He says, "I never had quite as much to begin with as some other people did. They began life under optimum conditions, they began life with a silver spoon in their mouths. Not so for me!"
>
> ...so there are some people who cherish the teaching of this parable because they can hide behind the fact that they happen to be just "one-talent" people....

I'm not so sure that Jesus spoke this parable to give anyone a measure of comfort. I think Jesus spoke the parable in order that we might understand that God is a very demanding God, and that God holds every single one of us responsible, responsible with what we do with what we have, whatever the amount.

Some people then shy away from this parable because they don't delight in thinking of a God who can be very demanding and of a God who can hold people terribly responsible. The chap in this story who receives the condemnation happens to be the "one-talent" fellow, and when Jesus told the story He was holding him responsible because of what he did not do, for the risk he did not take, for the investment he did not make.

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There are any number of us who run a course through life excusing, always excusing themselves, because we're not in the better position that other people are. Before I came to you, in the parish that I served in Pennsylvania, we undertook a very ambitious thing. We launched a financial campaign to construct a Christian Education unit. It was quite a thing for that congregation to do. Well, having gone through it yourselves, you who were part of this parish back in the early 50's, you remember all the careful planning that had to take place, and what a magnificent thing it could be if when the campaign was launched for funds it could be announced at the very beginning that the responsible leadership of the parish had already signed on the dotted line, and that they were in this thing, very definitely.

Well, we had a meeting like that back there in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. I can recall it now as though it happened last evening. We were gathered together...

> ...now in that company gathered together was a millionaire that we happened to have in the parish....and you can readily understand how all the eyes were focused on him....
>
> ...being a good student of human nature, he realized that, so immediately he said, "Well, this is what my wife and I plan to do - - "...and he named the amount, a rather staggering sum.
>
> ...and then some dumb-witted chap was stupid enough to say, "Well, if I had your money, I'd do the same thing."
>
> ...the fellow retorted immediately: "I'm doing proportionately with what I have. Why don't you do the same proportionately with what you have!" ....a perfectly good and valid answer!

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- - and that's part of the thrust of this parable that Jesus was teaching.

From time to time in the teaching of catechetical classes I ask the boys and girls to take a sheet of paper and on one side to write down how they'd spend a million dollars if they had it . . .

> ...and being millionaires in the class session, you see -- there they go with their grandiose schemes, how they'd spend a million dollars if they had it . . .
>
> . . . then I ask them to turn the page, and on the other side to list how they'd spend fifty dollars, or perhaps more to the point, to have them list whatever amount of money they had in their own control - - how would you spend it?

You see, this is always the acid test: what to do with what I happen to have - - how to use what I do control.

No matter how you look at this parable, the central thrust is the responsible use of what's been entrusted to us. God is the giver of all things, and He's a very demanding God. He holds us responsible, and if you please, He expects a return, a good return. If you want a portrait of God for the moment, paint Him as a shrewd investor who calculates the risks in order that there might be a return.

Dr. C. H. Dodd says that you can't properly understand this parable unless you see it in its precise setting:

- - just when did Jesus teach it?

- - where was He when He told this story?

- - to whom did He tell it?

- - and for what purpose?

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Let me give you the answers to those four questions.

He was nearing the end of His ministry. He was approaching the city of Jerusalem. It was at a time when there were those who believed that the Kingdom of God was at hand, the end of the world was near, and so to a group of pious Jews, Jesus told this story about a property owner returning to get an accounting of his own. He wants them to understand that Jesus Christ is God-come-to-us - - - now is the time of accounting.

As far as the Jews were concerned, God had given to them the Law and the prophets. They of all the people on the face of the earth, the ones in whom God had made this great investment -- what had they done with it? There were any number of Jews in that day who kept it all to themselves. They were a very, very exclusive company. They had no concern for anyone beyond their chosen family.

I'm wondering if one couldn't apply this fundamental truth to the Christian Church today. Sometimes I have my moments when I honestly believe we're near the end of things. I have been reading all over again the New Testament. It's a tremendous experience -- to expose yourself to the pressures and the strain and the stress of the kind of world in which the early Christians lived. Many of its features are being written largely upon the horizon of our time. So if God-in-Judgment comes to us who are members of the Christian family, and He were to say, "I gave you Jesus Christ. What have you done with Him? - what risk have you taken in His name? - - how far have you traveled? -- where have you gone with Him? - - - - - "

I don't know what picture you have of Judgment. There are those who tell me that the day has come and gone when you can use the picture of hell-fire,

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brimstone and damnation - - that we should banish forever from any concept of Judgment that figure standing there with tail and horns and a pitchfork. Well maybe we'd better have done with that, if he no longer frightens you or prepares you for Judgment.

How about this one: I honestly believe that there is going to be a Judgment - - I'm one of those preachers who does believe it. I honestly believe that every day is a kind of judgment . . .

> ...and if you want to use the figure of speech, in the last great day I picture Jesus Christ looking me in the eyes, and the thing that I believe that I will fear most will be to have Him stare straight into my soul and have Him say:
>
> "I gave you life - -
> I gave you certain gifts and skills - -
> I gave you a specific chapter of time - - - -
> - - - what have you done with it?"

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Fifth Sunday After Trinity July 6, 1969

"HOW TO HANDLE THE INEVITABLE"

There remains in each of us, O God, the deep need of the heart. Speak to us now, that we may hear, and as we hear we may listen with understanding. Through Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

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Now about the sermon. It could meet your need if you happen to be the kind of person who on occasion has honestly believed that if he were only somewhere else, or perchance he had married some other woman, or if only he didn't have the children that he happens to have - - - all this is simply to say that if you should be the kind of person who on occasion honestly believes that if only his situation were different, he himself could become a far better person. Who among us has not experienced the temptation to run away, honestly believing that in some other pasture one's lot would be far better? If this has ever happened to you, then here's a sermon that's meant for you.

If it's a title you want, how about trying this one on for size: "How To Handle The Inevitable"; and the text that even prompts the title as well as the sermon itself is from the Old Testament, from the prophecy of Jeremiah, it's the 42nd chapter and it's the 14th verse:

> "No, we will go to the land of Egypt, where we shall not see war, or hear the sound of the trumpet, or be hungry for bread, and we will dwell there - - "

It's the old idyllic dream, you see, honestly believing that somewhere else it will be far better than here -- Paradise just around the corner -- so I will go from where I am to it.

We in America are exceedingly fortunate. We have many blessings. Not the least among them is the fact that we have never been an occupied people. This is not true for many other sections of the world. One country after another has known the yoke of the oppressor and the terrible stamp of the heel of the invading force.

Nations that are occupied become eventually veritable tinder-boxes.... ..you simply wait for some spark that is inevitable, and once it comes, you have the conflagration. The people in Judea were in that kind of a fix. They were occupied. The Babylonians had taken over, the Babylonians had placed over Judea a puppet governor. The history of occupied peoples usually includes this chapter -- assassination -- so this puppet governor was assassinated....

> ...the panicky pack of jeopardized Jews wondered what would happen next. No matter what it was that might happen, they were convinced that they didn't want to be part of it, that they'd be far better off somewhere else.....for you see, there is always the risk of the grand swell stroke that could bring annihilation once people attempt to throw off the yoke of the oppressor.....

When I think of that first trip to Europe, some twenty-two years ago, when on a Sunday afternoon I went outside Prague to visit what had been the town of Lidice - - and just the very mention of the name unfolds the whole chapter for some of you. On May 27, 1942, the despized Nazi commandant, Heydrich -- the Hangman, they called him -- was murdered. His successor swore complete revenge - - "We'll show these Czech people that they can't throw off the yoke of the oppressor - - we will make an object lesson for all of Europe - - "

> ...they went to Lidice....took the men and the boys and lined them up against the wall of a barn, killed them,

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buried them in a mass grave....they took the
women and the children and carted them off to
a concentration camp...

...having done this, they burned every house, every hut,
every dwelling, every shack in Lidice, leveled
it to the ground, and then they brought in
horses and plows and turned the debris under-
neath, and planted corn.....Lidice was obliterated
from the face of the earth....

...this is the risk, you see, anyone runs when in occupied territory he may attempt to throw off the yoke of the oppressor. This is history at any time, where there is occupation.

So the Jews naturally began to panic in their day, and they were convinced that any place else they'd be far better off then to go on living in Judea.

Well, where would they go? - - "Let's go to Egypt -- that's the place. There are no trumpets sounding legions to go off to battle, there's no war in Egypt. There is plenty of food in Egypt, there's no strife - - that's where we'll go."

But those Jews were odd people. They always were haunted by the fact that they did belong to God and they were the Chosen Ones. So they were inclined to think that they hadn't better go down to Egypt until they first got the divine imprimatur - - how wonderful it would be if God were to give the O.K. to it. Even though they had made up their mind, they turned now to Jeremiah, God's man, and they said, "Jeremiah, find out what God's will is for us!" - -

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- - even though already they had made up their mind. But how comforting, you see, it would be if there would be the long shot that maybe God might think the same way as they would.

Jeremiah took a little while to think the thing over. He wasn't about to panic. It took him a week and three days, and after ten days he came back and he gathered all the Jews and he said, "Well, here it is. You wanted to know what Godthinks? - - I'll tell it to you as it is - - "

(Jeremiah was that kind of man)

" - - God says, don't go. God says, stay. God says, stick it out, and I'll hold you up. I'll give you help."

Well, they weren't so sure that Jeremiah had really done what they wanted him to do. They rationalized a bit and they said, "Jeremiah, you've come under the influence of your younger protege -- he's an activist -- he's a bravado -- he's influenced you, Jeremiah. We're going to go to Egypt."

Then a very peculiar thing happened. They even persuaded Jeremiah to go along with them. So to Egypt they went. What happened in Egypt? Eventually there was war there...eventually there was famine in Egypt. And Jeremiah had made this kind of prediction.

This is the classic expression that you get from Scripture, which is simply a real reading of live itself. You just never run away from life. There is no place where there aren't problems. That's true for this reason as it isn't true for any other reason, that some of us have a way of making our own problems. I treasure the moments when I used to be able to talk with Dr. Fife, the President Emeritus of our Maryland Synod. And every now and then he'd evaluate congregations and he'd evaluate pastors. And one of the things that would vex the heart of any good president of a synod would be that there would

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be pastors who had problems. There were problem pastors, there were problem congregations, and the president of a synod, like the pastor of a congregation, carries these around in his heart. Then I remember how on one occasion Dr. Fife said, "But there are some pastors who make their own problems."

There is that kind of person, too, that no matter where he goes, within no time at all he's going to have problems. If they weren't there before he got there, because of the strange mixture of personality and temperament that he is, it won't be long until there are problems after he arrives, but if that were not the fact, the nature and character of life itself is that there is no satisfaction that is completely void of strife and strain and stress.

Now there are two points in this sermon that we need to recognize. The first is that because this is true, that you can't run away from life, it becomes a very salutary thing to accept what seems to be the inevitable. Don't ignore it. Call it by name, and then come to grips with it.

Spending some almost three decades in the ministry now, I've been privileged to listen in on human hearts, one chapter after another....

...if only he had married the other woman

...if only he had taken the other job

...if only his child, his son or his daughter,

had the temperament and the personality,

and the decency and the respect, of someone else's

son or daughter that he happens to know.....

...that's the way it goes.....the natural complaint of many of us:

"If only.....if only.....if only....."

But the situation happens to be as it is. Accept it. Begin at that point.

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That's only the first point.

The second point in the sermon is this: to recognize that God enables us to be made equal to the situation. What they never heard Jeremiah say was this: Jeremiah said, "But God will hold you up, God will give you strength." If only you and I, when we face the issues of life, would learn to take our eye away from the issue sometime, to the source of our strength. But some of us never get our eyes beyond the perplexity to the person of Jesus Christ himself, who enables us, who empowers us - -

> ...he was here at the other service. I suppose there was only one person who knew him. He doesn't mind that I tell you this -- he's come back from Vietnam, he's a Marine Corps veteran. Somebody in this congregation became God's instrument to talk to him about Jesus Christ. He's never been baptized, he's never had any formal religious training. It's all brand new to him.....

...so as an inquirer he sits down with me, and we cover this thing brand new and fresh, this whole business of the Christian religion, this whole matter of a confrontation with the fact of God-come-to-us-in-Jesus Christ.

One of the assignments I've given him as he travels the inquirer's path, looking forward to his baptism, is to take the New Testament and to read it, which he's doing for the very first time. It was Matthew, his account of Jesus Christ. And after he had read about half of Matthew I said to him, "Well, what do you think of this Jesus Christ? You've been reading about what He said and what He did, where He went - - - what do you think of Him?"

It's just wonderful to get the reaction of a person who sizes Jesus up for the first time. He said, "Well, my impression, Pastor, is that he was somebody who was bent on helping people. Oh, he was also the kind of a person who

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wasn't shoved around -- he didn't let people get away with things....but my first impression, Pastor, is that he was always trying to help people."

Well, bless his soul. He's being introduced to the very nature and character of God, because that's what God is -- our helper. When Jesus was here on earth He was constantly besieged with the problems of people, all kinds of problems. One day there was somebody who tried to analyze and to evaluate and to assess the life of Jesus Christ and he came up with just one statement: "He just went around doing good."

As Jesus ended His ministry He talked a great deal about the Holy Spirit. He had another expression, He called him the Holy Comforter. Now from your Latin you remember the comforter is the one who gives you strength to stand, who shores you up, who makes you equal to (free translation, of course) -- but to make you strong. That's what real comfort is. So Jesus Christ said, "After I'm gone, God won't let you helpless. Sure you're going to have problems -- how well I know that you have problems.....but God will still be operative. Now you may still have to stay in this world where you are, but the Enabler, the Comforter and the Sustainer, will take over."

With all the ardor of my soul this is what I say to you: accept the fact that the situation may be as it is, but remember that God is able to help you to see through your situation. Jesus Christ went to the Garden of Gethsemane, He was confronted with the inevitable. Human as He was - -

"Isn't there some other way?"

...in His pure humanity He might have cried out:

"God, of all the people to send me to, why did you have to send me to these people?"

...human as we are, there's the cry of certain people's voices: "Of all the people

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I had to get married to, why did it happen to be that woman?"

..."of all the people with whom I have to work, why does it have to be in that office and under that man? "

...so the human voice is echoed and echoed and re-echoed.

For what it may be worth to you, my friend, I've reached the point where occasionally I can look back over some chapter of experience, and I've had my moments, when I've branded conditions intolerable, when things begin to deteriorate, and momentarily at least, I wished that I were somewhere else. Now that I look back and evaluate it, I thank God for it, for I discovered in and through Him a source of strength that otherwise I would hever have known. And in the final analysis, it isn't so much where you are that matters, as it is what you do with what you have, wherever you happen to be. That's the basic test of character.

Oh, don't get me wrong - - I haven't progressed so well that I can face anything from this point on. I think I'll shy away from any other experience that seems to be intolerable, as the future may unfold it. But, this time at least, I'll have something to remember that may hold me in good stead. If this should be your experience, remember it, my friend. There is no such thing as an idyllic state. There's trial and there's tribulation and there's trouble, as long as a man lives. God, with the goodness of His heart, invades our world and becomes the Continuing Companion, the Perpetual Presence, to enable us to persevere.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Prayer offered by Pastor Shaheen
July 6, 1969

WE ARE a gathered company, O GOD, yet each of us has his moment before Thee when he begins to think that maybe he's the only person with the burden upon his shoulders. Yet, O God, ours is a common lot, and we travel a common path. Therefore hear our prayers in behalf of one another.

O GOD, enable us to deal graciously and sympathetically with one another, for does he not also have his problem.

THEN we approach Thee, Giver of all Good, Source of all Strength, Bestower of all Grace, in Thee and through Thee we find what we cannot find anywhere else. Accept our gratitude. And above all else, for the lifting of the burden of sin, for the promise of pardon.

O GOD, we pray for this Congregation, its endeavor to minister effectively in this day, in Thy Name, with outstretched arms touching many people in many places.

WE PRAY, O GOD, for our nation, for those who would direct our course among the free peoples of the world.

O GOD, we pray for peace and those who work for peace. Remove from our hearts hostility, that the hostile forces let loose in the world may be lessened.

O GOD, keep before each of us the hope of Heaven.

OUR FATHER.....

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"WHAT IS MAN?"

It was 11:15 p.m. - - - or was it 10:58? Was it last Tuesday - - or was it a week ago Thursday? Well, for our purpose this morning, quite frankly it doesn't make a bit of difference. It's enough that you should know that as we neared the hour of midnight, in the blackness of the night, the silence was interrupted by the barking of a fox. Now of all the times that we've headed for the hills of home for our vacation, it was not until this time that the four-legged sly-one-of-the-woods got our attention. Not really. For my companion in the quiet of the night — you can refer to him, if you will, as others do, as the "Abraham Lincoln" or the "Daniel Boone" of Pleasant Valley, said to me: "Listen carefully! Something's going to follow."

Shortly upon the barking of the fox, in the distance we could hear the howling reply of all the dogs in the area. It wasn't our attention that the fox wanted to get. He was just clever enough to know that once he would bark, he'd be able to get the response of his natural enemy, then he'd know their precise location....

> ...so I mused to myself, and I said, I wonder when it was that the fox discovered that he could be that clever.....I wonder when it was that he found out, in this created order of things, that he could be the sly one - - for surely this is his distinction.

Was it three days later? or was it two? Was it in the morning, or was it in the afternoon? Well, for our purpose this morning it makes no difference whatsoever. It's enough for you to know that as I was seated on the porch of

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the country house with my book in hand, my eye went beyond the printed page and focused upon what seemed like a series of 8 - 9 - 10 magnified dots, all rolled up into one, with hypersensitive projections, moving along at a feverish pace - - - that's my rather obtuse description of a spider spinning his web.....

> ...I watched him for unbroken minutes, and then I mused to myself and I said, I wonder when it was that he first discovered that in God's created order of things he was meant to be that intelligent, that with a gossamer-like thread he could fashion a web by which to receive his prey.....when was his moment of discovery, that he should realize that this was his distinction?

It was two weeks ago today. I can give you the precise date — July 21, 1969. I can give you the precise moment — it was seventeen minutes past four o'clock, and forty-two seconds, when man put his foot upon the moon. Soaring through space and outer space, 250,000 miles away, this biped creature, heretofore referred to as earth-bound, not steps foot upon the moon. The feat is acclaimed everywhere....

.....when did he first discover that he could soar through space and outer space? when did he first discover the way to the moon? That, I said to myself as I mused, is purely incidental. For what is the crowning distinction of man except this: that he's the only thing in God's created order who is able to adress questions to himself, and to discover a kind of intelligent answer. It is man who says: What is man? It is man who says: Who am I?

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This is his distinction, this is his great moment, when he can discover precisely who he is.

> O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy Name in
> all the earth! who hast set thy glory above
> the heavens.
> Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast
> thou ordained strength because of thine enemies,
> that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.
> When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy
> fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast
> ordained;
> What is man, that thou art mindful of him, and
> the son of man, that thou visitest him?
> For thou hast made him a little lower than the
> angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.
> Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of
> thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet;
> All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the
> field;
> The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and
> whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.
> O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy Name in all
> the earth!

Several days later, after that great feat, some news commentator, in a very exaggerated statement, refers to man's latest accomplishment as "the greatest act since creation itself." I say to you, it isn't really as wonderful as all that, wonderful as it may be. The crowning glory of man is not that he might be able to find his way to the moon, and to discover its course - - - the crowning glory of man is that he's able to look down deep inside himself and find out precisely who he is. Where a man may be, where he may go, are purely incidental to what or to who a man is.

It's a far cry, I presume, from these episodes of the past three weeks as I sat and mused, whatever moments I allowed myself for reflection, to that time some 22 years ago when I first went to Europe, and I found myself aboard the Orient Express, the train that goes from Paris to Warsaw, with diplomats a dime-

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a-dozen. It was right after the war and we were on a sealed train as we went through occupied Germany. It was something to go through French-occupied Germany, the English and the American zones. But then we came to the Russian zone, and we became rather uneasy, for some of us had never seen a Russian, let alone see a Russian in uniform. But when we came to the Russian-occupied territory, he boarded our train and he came to our compartment, gathered up all of our passports and went out. An air of uneasiness prevailed in the compartment, for you see, in Europe the most bereft of all Americans is the American without a passport. Then after a while it occurred to me, well, why not relax - - he's only doing his duty. The passport will come back, and while he does have the passport what is there to fear? For basically he's only interested in getting the answers to several questions, and they have already been given. . . .

He wants to know:

- - who are you? - - what's your name?

- - where were you born? - - date of your birth?

- - where do you live? - - where are you coming from?

- - where have you been?

The last question:

- - what's your destination? - - where are you going?

These, I submit to you, are four very important questions which every man in his pilgrimage through life must be able to answer. And for some people, being able to give the answers properly to these questions becomes the most important single discovery in their life, to discover that they do have the right answers to the right questions.

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Schopenhauer, the philosopher, was once found on a park bench, and a youngster, perhaps about your age (to Sunday School youngsters attending church) came up to him and saw this man, and just as you might be wont to do, the youngster said to Schopenhauer, "Who are you?" And the very wise and intelligent man gave, honestly now, a very wise and intelligent answer. He said, "That's what I'd really like to know." And this is the question that many of us keep asking ourselves - - who are we? It's a great moment of discovery when a man really finds out the correct answer.

In the New Testament, John, the beloved disciple, says magnificently, "We are the sons of God, that's what we are." And a wise man, centuries before the day of Jesus Christ, the Psalmist of old, said, "I know what I am. I'm someone that God has made. He's made me a little lower than the angels, and He's made me to have dominion over all things in His created world." My friend, each of us is on somewhat of a pilgrimage through life, and each of us has to come to grips with this important question: Who am I?

When I went through my home town during my vacation period, I passed reverently the church in which I had been baptized, the church in which I had been confirmed, and I had good and precious thoughts of that man-of-God who for almost 38 years shepherded that congregation. I sat under his preaching, and like these boys and girls, and perhaps much as you, I can't recall very many sermons that I've heard, I can't recall a single sermon as such that he preached. But he communicated the Gospel, all right, and he related to me, and he established in my mind the fact of God very clearly. Well, I do recall occasionally, however, there comes upon the horizon of my thought an illustration that he used. You've heard me refer to it before.

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It was before World War II, and his illustration was from World War I..... ...a man had been gassed in that war - - irreparable damage had been done. An American Legion Convention was being held. This man in bewilderment and confusion found himself on the stage, and he directed this very poignant question to all the people who were there: "Is there anybody here who can tell me who I am?"

I submit to you that all of us have our skirmishes in life. Each of us is called to do some kind of engagement in the battlefront. It may come with a thousand-and-one different characteristics and traits. I've had my limited share of skirmishes in life. But I know that sanity was restored only when I was able to answer in the midst of it all as to just who I am, as to whether or not there would be any element of integrity remaining within me. It's a great moment in a man's life when he discovers who he is.

Where were you born? That, too, is an important thing to realize. Occasionally when I sit with those who know sorrow, they share with me out of the past little mementos. Yesterday I read an exceedingly precious letter written by a daughter to her mother in which she recalled in a very excellent fahhion the influences that had been at work on her life because she happened to have been born into the home that she was born, and that she happened to have the set of parents that she did, and that she happened to grow up where she did. A German philosopher used to say, with tongue in cheek, one ought to be very careful in the choice of his parents.....well, you and I know that we can't choose our parents, but that simply means that the indication remains that people who are called upon to become parents ought to be very careful as to the kind of parents they become, because in the formative years of a child's life the impression of the parents is made quite indelible.

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- - - where were you born?

- - what were the influences at work upon your life?

- - where do you live?

...this is not simply a matter of geography, physical geography, that is - - it's also the question of:

- - in what kind of an emotional climate do you live?

- - in what kind of a mental chamber do you eke out your existence?

We're not always found exactly where we're seated. I remember after that first trek, Winifred used to say, not sarcastically, but somewhat in jest, as I would sit in my chair and my thoughts would be afar off, to places where I'd been and things I'd shared - - she'd say to the boys, "Don't disturb your father now -- he's still over in Switzerland -- he's still over in London."

A man may live in places beyond where he happens to be precisely. Where do you live? Do you live in a world of hate? in a world of fear? in a world of love? It's always a frightening thing for people to discover that they've been living for years in a walled-up tower of hatred and distrust, to make the discovery that one actually lives where he lives may come as quite a revelation.

Then there's the last question: What's your destination?

Some people get the shock of their life when they discover where they're headed for. I will be eternally indebted to certain people who have met me along the highway of life, who have come at a precise moment and turned me completely around and headed me in the right direction.

- - what is your destination, my friend? what do you expect beyond this point?

I've lived long enough to believe that the most exciting person that I know, no

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matter what the age may be, is the person who is always looking forward to something beyond. Sometimes the saddest person is the person who is simply looking back.

In the first parish in which I served there was a woman with whom I visited, not a member of the congregation. She had had a great deal hit her between the eyes in life and her burdens were almost unbearable. Yet with a measure of peace she said, "Pastor, you're not my pastor, but I'll tell you just the same -- " .....and then her eyes lit up - - "I'm looking forward to that time when I will complete my earthly pilgrimage and see my Saviour face to face and be re-united with all those whom I love!"

For shame upon us if we don't think enough of that kind of thing in our day. And yet, do you know honestly, that whenever you and I come to church, in this magnificent liturgy of ours, we talk about the eternal dimension, and if our worship experience is to be anything at all, it's to give us a sense of bearing, and proper orientation. Blessed indeed is that person who makes the discovery for himself:

Who am I? I am a child of God.

Where am I headed? I'm headed for my Father's House.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Eleventh Sunday After Trinity August 17, 1969

"THE GLORY OF THE LORD"

It is no small thing to assume the leadership of a group of teen-agers, and the staff as well, as you spend a week on the mountain. So some of us were close enough to this year's camp director to be made aware of the awesome responsibility, as he recognized it, for his first time around. To those of us who were near at hand, it seemed as though he were looking upon everything with a kind of double vision, not only as to what it was meaning for the precise moment, but also what he might learn from it as he would anticipate another year.

It was just about a day and a half before camp ended that one of the staff members was near enough at hand to hear him say, "Well already I've thought in terms of the theme for next year's camp!" - - and then he said what it was: "To See The Glory of The Lord."

A church has no right to ask parents to entrust into their keeping a group of youth, and particularly so when you take them to the mountain-top, if the net result cannot be exposure to the glory of the Lord. Now all of this leads me to the text for today's sermon - - you'll find it in the 16th chapter of the Book of Exodus, the 17th verse:

"And then in the morning ye shall see the glory of the Lord."

By proper and careful design, of course, traditionally now we've seen to it that each day at Mar Lu Ridge, when we have our Saint Luke Week there, begins properly. We have been able to establish a few things that we call tradition, and one of them is The Morning Watch. In case you're unfamiliar with it, let

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me take a second to tell you about it.

Once the youngsters have been told that now it's time to arise, they get themselves ready physically, of course, to begin the day....and then even before breakfast, before their hand is given to anything else, for one quarter-of-an-hour each camper goes to a particularly chosen spot which he himself has selected...

...under a tree, on a rock, on a ledge....

...and with Bible in hand, and the especially prepared devotional guide, he gives himself to prayerful meditation.....

...a kind of holy hush descends upon the entire camp during this fifteen-minute period at the beginning of the day. I would be willing to pose as a prophet now, and make this prediction, that while they are but teenagers today, and they are not capable of fully evaluating the experience at camp, so close are they to it now - - but speaking out of my own experience at least, in the years yet to come, when they look back upon camp, long after many other things are forgotten, it's the recollection, with the holy hush, of the Morning Watch period that remains. If ever you are tempted to believe that youngsters can be insensitive to the things of the spirit, some of us who were exposed to them during this period have only to remember that they did know what it was to quiet the mind and to hush the heart.

It's an exceedingly precious thing to be able to see the glory of the Lord at the beginning of the day. Centuries before Jesus Christ this utterance appears on sacred Writ:

"And then in the morning shall ye
see the glory of the Lord."

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Did I tell you about that friend of mine, who leaving his hotel room, headed toward the elevator, and as he entered it, there was the elevator operator, with a glorious smile upon his face and he was gaily whistling. Very shortly thereafter there got on the same elevator a man with that harried morning-after look upon his face - - and rather sarcastically he said to the gaily-smiling, happily-whistling elevator operator, "And tell me, what makes you so happy? - - the day's just beginning." And immediately the chap replied, "Man, this is a brand new day! I've never lived this day before!" So God in His wisdom, God in His grace, gives to each of us a brand new day. It isn't too much to say that in His wisdom He designed that God should be a daily thing, and that each day then should have a glow and a halo all of its own, just because it is fresh and just because it's a brand new beginning.

Didn't one of you tell me the other night that there's a radio commentator who has a morning program who greets his listeners in this fashion, or near it, with the kind of salutation and admonition all bound up in one:

"Today is the first of the rest of your life!"

There are those who are so oriented that the beginning of each day, they face it on tiptoe.

There was the lady that I encountered - - I remember it well. It was April 18, 1969. I finished breakfast in the coffee shop in the Hotel Lancaster, Madison Avenue at 39th Street in Manhattan, and I went to get the morning paper. She was staffing the newsstand - - a rather nondescript character, the type of person that you'd hardly take a second look at. Trying to

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practice what I preach, I said to her, "The top of the morning to you! - - and a good and a grand day to follow!"

...immediately, as uninhibited as the dawn itself, she poetically replied:

"Sauntering winds and the human spirit
Do well to see the dust and clear it;
So morning dreams and yearning spark
Explode with light and clear the dark."

...you can readily understand why immediately I put a piece of paper in her hand and said, "Write it for me," that I might tuck it away and some day in the recesses of my mind recall it as quickly as she could - - to be able to greet a new day poetically, to be able to greet a new day enthusiastically.....maybe a man's justification to live out a new day is his willingness to greet it enthusiastically, and to be able to see at the beginning of each new day something of the glorious touch of God.

Some few years ago I remember having a complete physical. The physician had completed all of his examination. Then he called me into his office, and he said, "Now there are a few things I'd like to discuss with you," and he did. Then I thought that I was about to be dismissed, and he called me back and he said, "But really, now, I have one question yet to ask you, and as far as I'm concerned, strange as it may seem to you - - as far as your own physical well-being is concerned, this is about as important a question as I could ask - - "

...and I began to feel rather uncomfortable, wondering what he might pick, now, from his Materia Medica and throw at me.....

...and, lo and behold, he said, "This is the question-of-questions: How do you feel when you get up in the morning? Are you raring to go? Do you face a new day eagerly, or do you drag yourself into it?"

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God gives us each new day as a fresh beginning. I do not think it's too much to say that in His wisdom He provides us the interim of the night and in that interim it can be like a cloud or a mantle cast upon us, by which all that was undesirable in yesterday can be blotted out, and as the day begins God is saying to us, "Here, it's a fresh one, it's a clean one! Yesterday is over. Whatever it is that's sordid about it, and ugly, forget it! You are forgiven."

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I honestly believe with all the ardor of my soul that a man ought to have his unusual moments when he's made aware of his commitment to Jesus Christ and Christ's claim upon his life. I honestly believe that every man ought to be able to point toward mountain-top experiences, when it's unmistakably clear to him that he and God belong to each other. And while these are rare and precious moments, that have a halo all of their own, I also believe that the kind of an experience that I've just been describing ought to be felt within a man's soul every single day. Did not Martin Luther remind us that a man should be baptized unto Christ daily? Jim and Rosemary, you who have presented your precious child to have the sign and the seal of God's favor indelibly stamped upon Valerie, even as you have done it for your other children, will you not do well, as every parent in Christ ought to do, to look upon their children afresh each new day, and say, "These have been baptized, they are claimed by God -- God's gift to us -- we are His stewards to care for them." Is it too much to say when God gives us each new day, This is the most precious thing that comes from the hand of God -- LIFE -- and the opportunity to live it.

I'm not so sure that everyone was fully aware of it, but there was a unique moment on Thursday night at Mar-Lu-Ridge when we went outdoors for our Vesper Worship Period. Fortunately, every day this week God accommodated us with a glorious sunset, but this day seemed to be an exception -- seemed to be. We were a little late in going out to Pine Rock for the Vesper Period, and when we gathered together, 46 campers and 18 staff, the western horizon seemed to be blotted out with a grayish cast, and I said to myself, we're too late for the sunset tonight. The service was conducted. Just before the Benediction was about to be pronounced we were drenched gently by rain....and then the instruction was given that they should go quietly and as reverently as possible for the concluding part of the service into the chapel itself....

...and as we turned to go, someone said, "Look!" - - and as I turned around -- there was the re-appearance of the sun. It had not set. Now it re-appeared as a mass of flaming red, as though God were saying to us, "In the scheme of eternity, darkness is only for a while, but always the sun."

There are other thoughts that come quickly to mind when I realize the full meaning of the text, or at least partially so, I should say, "In the morning shall ye see the glory of the Lord." I've had the job of my life, as some of you know, in the last several years, to keep my soul going according to the gospel of hope. The events of these recent years rest heavily upon my shoulders, as they do upon the shoulders of anyone who does not take a detached attitude upon contemporary society. Sometimes I think the dark night has settled in upon us -- man's inhumanity to man.....we who limp along, only looking back and seeing nothing but a chain of frustrations behind us. But every now and then God raises up in front of us some stalwart soul, with

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eternal light shining in his eye. God does this for us periodically. The Scriptures say, "In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son" - - and for the moment you can spell Son (sun) either way - - "filled with light and truth and grace."

Some of us go limping along through life, and now God raises up somebody for us who is always reminding us that the dawn is sure to come, always another day, a fresh day. G. K. Chesterton has written in almost classic fashion how God invades history from time to time with people the like of which I've just described. Listen to him now:

> "While it was yet twilight a figure appeared
> silently and suddenly on a little hill above
> the city. Dark against the fading darkness,
> for it was the end of a long and stern night,
> a night of vigil, not unvisited by stars.
> He stood with his hands lifted, as in so many
> statues and pictures, and about him was the
> burst of birds singing, and behind him was
> the break of day."
>
> ...that was Saint Francis, bringing back
>
> the morning....
>
> "And in the morning men shall see the glory
> of the Lord"

If we are true to what we believe, do we not honestly order our days always in the prospect of the eternal dawn? Call death ax darkness if you will, but Eternal Life in Jesus Christ is always to be thought of as the dawn of Eternity - -

> "And then in the morning ye shall see the
> glory of the Lord."

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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"THOUGHTS AT RANDOM ON A SAINT'S DAY"

One salutary thing, perhaps, did result from the fact that the Roman Catholic Church in its upheaval removed certain names from the category of the saints, but there are some folks who never knew that their names existed in the calendar even before the time the announcement was made. For shame upon us Protestants when we fail to recognize that in the calendar of the Church we do have our own listing of the saints. Every now and then you may come to church, even on a Sunday, or if you came during the week, you might find that the paraments are red, indicative of the fact that it's a saint's day.

Today is such a day. If you've read the listing that appears on the bulletin that you ought to have in your hand you will notice that it's St. Bartholomew, Apostle, Day, August 24. I would embarrass you, undoubtedly I would, as you would perhaps embarrass me, if someone were to rise and to say either to you or to me, Name three things about Bartholomew. This sermon today, incidentally, is a reflection upon this saint's day - - thoughts at random, if you please, concerning a man among others who ought to be remembered. Yet we're hard-pressed to name the things for which we ought to recall his name.

To begin with, let me read for you the prayer that the Church offers traditionally on this day. It's already been offered. You do well to hear it again:

> ALMIGHTY GOD, who hast made the remembrance of thine apostles days of gladness and joy to thy Church: Grant that we may ever love thee whom they loved, and set forth the doctrine which they taught; through thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end.

When this prayer was first offered there was a very noble intention that people would look upon this day with joy and with gladness at the remembrance of a man. But again I say to you, we could embarrass each other by saying, name three things that can be said about Bartholomew, and particularly three things for which his name ought to remain in the calendar of the saints, so that from generation to generation we should treat his name with respect, and I dare say with reverence. For there are some folks for whom a halo is very appropriate. It might be twisted, and it might be torn, and occasionally the person may have to reach down into the dust and pick it up and straighten it out and put it back there.....but there are some folks who go through life for whom a halo is most naturally becoming.

What can we say about Bartholomew?

Well, let's wrestle with this thing together. We know this about him: he was one of the twelve disciples.

Now what does that say to us? He was one of all the people whom our Blessed Lord met on the face of this earth deliberately chosen and selected to become part of a select group. That says a great deal about a man.

You're not forgetting, are you, that Jesus Christ met thousands of people. Wherever He went He had an eye for people. Surely He was perceptive. In God's plan for His life the selection had to be made of twelve people who would constitute a kind of solid corps through whom He could work, through whom, if you please, He would leave a legacy of the Kingdom, so that once He had finished His earthly pilgrimage He could take for granted that the Kingdom would go on, channeled through the lives of all whom He had touched, and most particularly, and specifically, through one select group of people....

...well, this is the first thing that we can say about him....he was one who was parti-

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cularly chosen.

Now we do well to ask the question: What was there about him that prompted Jesus Christ to select him?

One can very easily hazard the guess that there must have been something about him that indicated that he was a man of integrity, he was a man who would recognize that if responsibility was put upon his shoulders, that he would fulfill his obligations. But more significantly, he was the kind of a man who would be willing to become a follower. Do you know that the very first thing that Jesus Christ asks about any man is his willingness to learn, his willingness to follow, his willingness to obey. The sad thing about many of us in our day is that we have never quite mastered the art of following. Who doesn't want to be a leader on his own? Much of the difficulty in our day is that everybody wants to make the decisions, and he wants to make the decisions on his ground, he wants the thing to be seen his way, and seldom enough do we wrestle with the fact that maybe over and above us there is another way, another point of view, to which we ought to adhere.

When our Blessed Lord was here on earth He chose twelve people. The very first thing that He asked about any one of them was that they would be willing to follow Him. In fact, the Scriptures have it, His directive was this, as He met those whom He called:

"Follow me" - - presumably nothing else was said,

and if there was anything else said, this was the way it was finally resolved:

"Come after me - - learn of me - - be my disciple."

It's no small thing when you can discover an individual willing to just learn. There is hope for the future wherever you can find people who come forward in order that they might fall behind, fall behind the master, fall behind

the leader. This is one thing that you and I can say about this man Bartholomew, he met this qualification.

In wrestling with these thoughts I found myself rather uncomfortable when I realized that one could make this kind of a relevant application of this fundamental truth. Suppose God's designated leader of the church, whomever it might be, would come into our congregation and he would say, "I'm taking the long look...I'm thinking of years yet to come for Saint Luke Congregation...and all that I dream and all that I plan for this congregation may be fulfilled and channeled through a select group of people. Oh, I know that you have a thousand families on your roster - - I know that this may represent two thousand people from about twelve years of age and beyond - - "

...but the history of the Church has always been that God works through select groups. Don't shy awayffrom that. It's just a fact of life.

Even the Christian Church is God's called group, through whom He may prefer to work certain blessings for mankind while He holds all of the people on the face of the earth in the hollow of His hand. The God whom we have come to respect, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, is always a God who calls, and selects, and gathers to Himself a group through whom He will work. Not that He can't use everyone, but He has His preferred method of working through select groups.

...and suppose, now, in this manner and this spirit some leader of the church came and said, "I'll be looking for a select group in this congregation through whom certain blessings will be channeled in the years yet to come, who constitute the solid corps of this parish, so that come wind or weather, no un-

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settlement will ever deter the course which God has in mind for this parish."

You know there are always those who give themselves to some troubled path and easily separate themselves from the Body of Christ. But the Kingdom of God goes forward through His solid corps, through His select ones. Now the uncomfortable thought, if you please: Would you and I meet such a test? Would you and I be such people of integrity and reliability? Would you and I be the kind of persons who would make ourselves always subservient to His way? The curse upon the church, the curse upon any element of society, is always the group that's tending to go off and become a tangent, because it has to be seen through their eye. God says, "See it my way - - become my disciples."

Salutary of course is the Gospel Lesson for the Day, in which one thing is cited after another - - equally true of the Epistle that's been chosen for this Day, in which the admission is made that God works through a variety of people, and God works through a variety of offices. But we serve one and the same purpose as we covet for ourselves the greatest of all gifts which is the Spirit of God. Now that's about as relevant as I can make the application of this truth for anyone who might be here this morning - - that God saw fit to choose a Bartholomew because he happened to meet, above all else, the qualifications of allowing himself to become subservient to the Master's way.

Well in these thoughts that come at random in connection with this day of remembrance of a man, let me call to your attention something perhaps that you hadn't noted. If it weren't for the fact that Saint Bartholomew's name is printed on the bulletin, you wouldn't be aware of the fact that this is his day. Two passages of Scripture from the New Testament have been read, appointed as the Lessons for the Day. Neither one mentions Bartholomew by name.

Let me press a bit farther: can you recall any sermon that he preached?

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- - and yet ye was one particularly chosen who was "sent out" to proclaim the Good News. Some of those whom our Lord entrusted as members of that select group of disciples were able to perform miracles - - can you name any miracle that he performed? can you name anything that he did? - - yet he's remembered because he was faithful to his Lord and Saviour....which simply allows us to believe that he was never much interested in having people know who he was, or what he did. He just didn't write his name down at the bottom of the page, and put it glaringly in front of somebody whenever he did anything in God's name.

And I wish I could zero in here for all that I'm worth - -

> There's no end to the good that's done in this world if people just won't be concerned as to who's going to get the credit . . .

...do you mind if I repeat that? - -

> There just isn't any end to the good that can be done in this world if some people just wouldn't be overly concerned as to who might get the credit for doing it.

I think Saint Bartholomew must have been that kind of a man. God uses mightily those who are subservient to Him, who do what needs to be done just because it needs to be done, and do it in His name and to His honor and to His glory.

The longer I live the more I recognize the good that's let loose in this world by people who aren't much concerned as to who's going to get the credit. I wish I were able to tell you what I keep in the diary of my soul as your Pastor, the good that's unleashed in this congregation by people who just don't much care whether they're recognized or not....

...I hope you'll never tire of my telling you about the

Chapel of the Grateful Heart, this quiet corner of God's House that's come to mean so much to so many. If I were free some day to write a little book called "Within The Walls of The Chapel" I might be able to recite how souls have been renewed and restored by an experience in that place. It came, as you know, as a complete gift to this congregation from someone who said, "I'm grateful for what God has done for me through this parish." And then when it was completed, the person said, "I've done it because I'm grateful and God knows who I am and that's all that matters."

...bear with me for a moment - - one of these days I'll be sitting down with Church Council, and I'll tell them about some very fascinating things - - the largest single gift that this congregation has ever received, to be used in one of our developmental programs, by a person who says, "I want to remain anonymous."

...oh, I could write any number of chapters for you - - interesting and fascinating in any regard. We've a photograph somewhere - - I don't think we've ever put it on display....an 80-year old woman and her daughter, weeding the azalea bed on the way that leads to the red doors, just because it had to be dome...not waiting for a committee to be appointed, not waiting to be assured any kind of recognition.

...one gets strange thoughts when he looks at strange things. I get a peculiar thought when I look at a woodpile. We have this little place back in the hills of home. It's about an acre. We have no wooded tract on it at all. We thoroughly enjoy using the fireplace - - we have to purchase the logs for the fireplace. One day, lo and behold, when I came,

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there was a cord of wood, perfectly ranked, and to this day I haven't found the person I could thank. I don't know who did it - - done simply because somebody felt that it would be a gracious thing to do, and not waiting to be thanked.....and this Mother of mine always taught me to say "thank you" - - you can imagine my irritation when I'd like to thank someone, consummate the whole matter as it ought to be consummated.... ....oh, I have a number of volunteers that come to my mind that I think is the type of person that might have done it.....

Which leads me to say to you and to me as well, some undesignated act of kindness, done just because it had to be done, and people might wonder who it was that did it - - would they think of you? would they think of me?

Well, these are thoughts at random on this St. Bartholomew, Apostle Day. God in His wisdom has seen fit to use people, and the halo becomes some people. It might be twisted, it might be torn, they may have to stoop down in the dust to pick it up and put it back in place, but the halo is there, and the halo is there just because they're bent on channeling into the lives of other people something of God's grace and something of God's love.

Interestingly enough, I don't know of anybody that I ever met whose name was Bartholomew. The closest that comes to it was a shoemaker in the small town in which I grew up - - Bart Loss, a shoemaker. Oh, on Park Avenue, in Manhattan, what is in my book the loveliest of all churches in New York City, next to St. Thomas, is St. Bartholomew Church - - absolutely grand and eloquent. I suppose St. Bartholomew would blush indeed if he knew that they ever built a church as wonderful as that to be associated with his name.

Well, there you have it, my friend. Think kindly of him, will you? Maybe

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you may even have a noble intention to follow in his steps, that one day from Heaven above there might be an echo of this prayer, and the angels could think of you - - -

> ALMIGHTY GOD, who hast made the remembrance of thine apostles days of gladness and joy to thy Church: Grant that we may ever love thee whom they loved, and set forth the doctrine which they taught - - -

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Thirteenth Sunday After Trinity August 31, 1969

"THE-TRAVELER-WITH-THE-DIFFERENCE"

O GOD, despite our noblest intentions, we still bring along our limitations. We're frail, we are feeble. Yet if it please Thee, O God, may your Holy Spirit so possess us that we might the better hear the echo of Your voice in this place even now. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

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I don't know how it may be with you, but I speak only for myself. I've never quite had done with that sermon that I preached for you several weeks ago. It continues to haunt my mind, and I keep going back to it. Haply enough, today's Gospel Lesson for this 13th Sunday after Trinity is the very same passage. It's the passage which constitutes the Parable of the Good Samaritan. If you don't mind, let's begin this sermon today where that sermon of a few Sundays ago leveled off.

It leveled off by reminding us that all of life is a Jerusalem-Jericho road. Every single one of us is a traveler - - we are itinerant, we are pilgrims. Some of us are given to travel the road for a certain distance, but to every man there's always a road ahead. This is one thing that all of us can say about life - - we begin the journey, there is a destination. Whether a person is a Christian or not, the characterization remains: every single one of us finds himself on the highway called Life.

But the person who happens to be a Christian is not just any traveler. The Christian in God's sight is intended to be the traveler-with-a-difference. Now this is the kind of thing that you and I ought to talk about a little while this morning.

As we remember the parable of the Good Samaritan, there were different people traveling that road. But now for the text you'll be wanting for this sermon, you'll find it there in that 10th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, and these words:

"But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed - - "

- - how you have it, don't you -- "But a certain Samaritan - - "

...you brace yourself for the fact that this person is going to be a little bit different than any of the others that we've encountered on this highway which is called Life. To all intents and purposes, then, we want to talk about the Christian as the traveler-with-the-difference.

What is that difference?

Well, one does recognize that as the Christian finds himself on the highway which is called Life he has many things in common with all other people who travel. Don't ever allow yourself to believe that when the Christian is on the highway called Life, that God raises over him an umbrella that shields him in a way that other people are not shielded from the common ventures, from the common incidents which come to us all. And if you're ever tempted to believe that God has a special through-way for those of us who publicly profess faith in Him and who earnestly desire to do the things pleasing in His sight, God doesn't have a through-way for us to Heaven which in itself constitutes a limited-access highway. When a man becomes a follower of Jesus Christ, he has to travel the common route. Christians were never meant to be separate. We remain in the world, and we have to travel the paths that other people have to travel.

Because this is true, it also means that whatever happens to them could

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happen also to us. That's just another way of saying that any man who travels the highway of Life discovers eventually the sign that reads:

"TRAVEL AT YOUR OWN RISK - THERE'S DANGER AHEAD"

Some people are on the road only a short distance until they read that sign, and there it is. Some people are fortunate enough to travel for years until they're confronted by the fact that the inevitable sign appears:

"DANGER AHEAD - - TRAVEL AT YOUR OWN RISK"

That sign does appear, and eventually every one of us is confronted by it.

What am I saying to you ever so quickly now? - - that life is always an element of risk, the risk of being hurt, the risk of being disappointed. Do not the automobile clubs across the land keep saying to us: Drive defensively — keep yourself always on the alert, that you might be able to meet quickly the sudden dangerous situation by which you might be confronted.

Sometimes the danger appears without the sign, and without the advance warning. Life, with other people on the road, means that there can be the irresponsible as well as the responsible, and a man must remember this.

Now the risk that is taken by any traveler is simply the realization that what happens to somebody else could happen to you. None of us is free from it. Take this Gospel Lesson for today. We talk about the different travelers on the road. Some of them are named - - priest - - Levite - - Samaritan. Interestingly enough, the one who is victimized is not named. It simply says,

"A certain man, as he traveled from Jerusalem
to Jericho."

It is well that it should be phrased that way, because that man could be any man. What happened to him could happen to any of us.....

...as far as the priest is concerned, his fate might have been

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the fate of the victimized....

...as far as the Levite is concerned, his fate might have been the fate of the victimized.....

...as far as the Samaritan is concerned, his fate might have been the fate of the victimized.....

...and one may quickly add - -

...as far as the robbers are concerned, they might have met their own despicable equal a mile farther down the road.....

Any man who travels the highway of Life runs the risk of being hurt, battered, broken, disappointed. It happens to good people, it happens to bad people. It could happen to anyone.

So I continue to be haunted by the fact that if life is a highway (and who will say that it isn't?) - - we travel at some risk - - always at some risk. There are those who attempt to detour, but nonetheless eventually they discover that it's never without some peril.

But this is not enough to say that life always means that we run the risk of being hurt. It's also to say that we run the risk of becoming involved with those who are hurt. If it doesn't happen to us, then eventually we may find our route where it has happened to somebody else! And it's never enough for a man to say, "There but for the grace of God go I" - - it's never enough to say it that way. So as you and I travel the highway of life, in case it doesn't happen to us, we're made aware of the fact that it has happened to somebody else, and then - - the issue is this: Will I allow myself the risk of becoming involved with those who have been hurt, or will I not?

You're now on the proving-ground of what could constitute the difference

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in the Christian traveler. When our Blessed Lord spoke about the Samaritan who traveled that way He was holding him up as a prototype for Christians, the traveler-with-a-difference. And that's exactly what Christians were meant to be - - the travelers-with-the-difference. One recognizes that when the Samaritan came that way, he also had this in common with the others who traveled that way but did not stop to help: Every single one of them who came that way took note of the fact that somebody had been victimized. None of them could say that he did not see it. The unsettling thing about the way God made us is that God did give us eyes, and God did give us a hand, and God did make us sensitive.....and every now and then we find ourselves exercising the faculties of sight, and of touch, and the general matter of being completely aware that somebody's been hurt.

The distinguishing characteristic of the Christian traveler now comes into focus - - the Samaritan sees and stops, and goes to him. He's running the risk of becoming involved. He's being made aware of the fact that something ought to be done and he's the one nearest at hand. There are people who have lived long enough to know that this is always a possibility, so they look quickly, and divert their glance, and travel at some distance.

Last spring when in New York on church business, we discovered that we ended a bit earlier. The evening was free. So I called Jon and said, "Jon, how about having supper with me tonight before I go back?" He found it possible to do so. We agreed mutually as to where we might eat - - he wanted to take me to a place that was different.....I walked those blocks from 39th Street on Fifth Avenue all the way down to 10th Street, in the neighborhood of Washington Square, Greenwich Village. Jon lives on the edge of that terrible Bedford-Stuyvesant area in Brooklyn.....

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....mention trouble stpots in metropolitan areas, and you always include Bedford-Stuyvesant.....he's learned a great deal living there.

He gave his father a bit of advice -- "As you walk, don't let them stare you too much in the eye!" -- and as I neared the area I knew exactly what he meant. They have a way of freezing on you, trying to catch your eye -- you daren't let them hold you too long, and what is more, you have to watch out lest you hold their eye.....

...frightening bit of advice, isn't it, that a man who would claim to be a Christian would have to insulate himself against a fellow human being, lest they get too much of a hold on him. But you and I know exactly what he was trying to say, because some of us might not be made equal to the situation that could arise, we just couldn't cope with it.

Who is it who said, very properly, that 'eye control' is a very important thing in the life of the Christian. The prototype for the Christian traveler is a Samaritan who having seen the victimized, went to him. He allowed himself the risk of becoming involved, directly and personally.

Because life is the way it is, and thanks to instant communication, and vivid portrayal of all that is sordid and miserable in life, we turn on the television set, and there it is -- half-a-world away -- all the misery of the deprived and the destitute -- it is in front of us, the hurt of humanity. We turn the dial on the radio, we can hear their voices -- then we turn the dial off, we shut off the television. You and I say to ourselves, there isn't anything that I can do as an individual, the problem is that great. Whether we articulate it or not, we say, Thank God it's as far away as it is -- we have a way of making ourselves that detached! And perchance it should be so, that of all the millions of Indians, there may be something that you can't do for any

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one of them, at this distance.

All right, God has a way, however, of raising up in front of us somewhere along the line on the highway of life the individual whom we cannot evade. He's there. And we find ourselves in a one-to-one situation, a person-to-person encounter. And what may surprise some of us is that we may not have to step outside the door of our own house or apartment to encounter that victimized traveler on the highway of life. He may be there, next door....he may be in the carpool.....he may be a friend of a friend of yours.....and in God's plan for your life and my life, one day he's in front of us. Then we have to produce the difference that characterizes the Christian.....

-- will we run the risk of becoming involved in his problem?

-- will we assume a measure of responsibility for his hurt?

The Christian is the traveler-with-the-difference. So, whatever else the Samaritan had on the schedule that day had to go by the board. He did what had to be done.

Oh, I say to you quickly, he might have gone back to Jerusalem and sent help, get the Rescue Squad there and they might have done a better job then he could do, and yet at the same time he could have evaded responsibility. He could have said, I will stay here and ward off any other danger that might come your way -- that would have been a good thing, but not the better thing that had to be done. He might even have said, "I'll give the first aid treatment on the scene, now" -- and then walk away and let somebody else take over. We're always looking for a convenient place to stop whenever we get involved in doing something good -- honestly. He might have stopped at that point.

But the traveler-with-the-Christian-difference completes his ministry of mercy. He takes him all the way to town, sees that he's guaranteed what needs

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to be done. Then as the Scriptures put it in a very classic fashion, it's the Samaritan who says,

"And whatever else you need, - - "

" - - whatever more - - "

...the Christian is the man with the more complex. This business of being a Christian is always a demanding thing, always a little bit more. The sad thing about it is this, we think it is wonderful that there should be travelers on the highway of life, but if we don't watch out we're like the little boy in Sunday School who was taught the Parable of the Good Samaritan. When he was asked by the teacher, what does this mean? - - he simply said, "It means that when we're in trouble, other people ought to help us."

...this is not the point of the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The point of the parable of the Good Samaritan is that the Christian becomes the traveler-with-the-difference who has his eye open for those who are in trouble, and initiates the responsibility to assume care in their behalf.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity September 7, 1969

"THE ISSUE"
(Matthew 20:607)

Tell me, my friend, on which side would you vote? - - who is greater, the person who raises the significant question, or the person who happens to find the answer? - - which, now, do you think is more important?

There are some people who go through life who have never known the thrill of being able to raise up the right question that demands answers, even though the answer may be late in coming, but to be able to stand up and say, "But what about this?" and to set people's minds at work in an entirely new and different direction, and to consider, perchance for the first time, a brand new concept. Men, I submit to you, are known not only by the answers that they are able to give or to repeat, but men are also known by the ability to ask the right question.

All this is prompted, my friend, by a reaction to what I've discovered in the reading of the 20th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, and a portion of the 19th chapter which flows into this 20th chapter. It occurred some weeks, some months ago, in anticipation of the sermons to be preached in Saint Luke from September until next June as the schedule was being arranged. And when I came upon this passage of Scripture which serves as the basis for today's sermon, I looked upon it as a king of interplay between Jesus Christ and His disciples.

They had gathered together, they had some time on their hands, and really now, it constitutes what we might refer to as a question-and-answer period. The question, according to the way Matthew recorded it, was put collectively:

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Question #1 in the series:

Who now shall be saved?

-- properly it's referred to as a question that was put collectively, because isn't this the question that eventually every man must deal with? Is there any question that could be more important for a man to wrestle with than this whole matter of being saved, from something, to someone?

As I listen to what's being said about our generation, people who have their vantage-point, people that we can afford to recognize as speaking to our condition, do they not say that the one word that characterizes us, perhaps more than any other word, is our lostness, that we are a people bewildered and confused, who lack a sense of direction, who do not fully appreciate where we happen to be, or what is more, where we ought to be, and who have never fully recognized where they've been.....

...a man can become lost in the wilderness of his own soul. That's why the Church wisely, years ago, established such a thing as a confessional booth. For shame upon the Church that all too frequently she's never been able wisely enough, and earnestly enough, and compassionately enough, to become effective in this way. That's why an increasing number have gone away and sought other sources, perhaps a couch. But then, a man could have his moment, and the Church when she's properly functioned, functions in this regard, to allow a man to hear some good and proper word that could lead him out of the wilderness of his own soul into the promised land of his salvation....

...a man can become lost very easily in the configuration of the pattern which is life itself which comes to us by the pressures that are constantly at work upon us. And because there is this constant hammering from so many directions, his only state is one of bewilderment and confusion, knowing not what

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direction to face next, or what is more, what step to be taken in any one direction.....

...a man can become lost in his relationship, not only with other people, but most certainly in his relationship with God, because he's never quite found out, until the claim of Christ fully possesses him, as to what is the nature and the character of God himself.....

-- so collectively Matthew has the disciples saying to Jesus as they put the significant question:

"Who is going to be saved?"

And as you know, of course, one question leads to another, related or unrelated, one question happens to trigger a series of questions. So as they waited there, after a while Peter stood up and he raised a question. It was quite a question that Peter posed. It must have occurred to Peter all of a sudden, I think, just what his situation was. He'd been a fisherman. Now no longer was he dealing in nets, or in boats, or in fishes. But he happened to find himself as somebody who was following an itinerant preacher, who once upon a time had been a carpenter's son. Now he recognizes that he was doing whatever this man said he ought to be doing -- he was following Him.

Some of us remember how we used to sing in Sunday School days the Sunday School song --

"I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,
I'll see what you want me to see, dear Lord,
I'll do what you want me to do, dear Lord,
I'll be what you want me to be, dear Lord -- "

-- earnestly we sang it and earnestly we meant it, and God pity us when we can't sing it or say it any longer. For a man is known by his noble intentions. .....well, Peter was that kind of a person, and he was reflective on it. He

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had done this very thing. He'd said goodby to the fishes and the net and the boat and the market - - - and then being so terribly, terribly human, he posed such a very practical question:

"Jesus, we've left everything to follow you,
what are we going to get out of it?"

One question leads to another, related or unrelated - - almost like a teenager, you see, who's suddenly caught by a set of apprehensive parents. For the moment at least the teenager is imprisoned in his awkward situation, and he's confronted by the question that just has to be put, and then the teenager stands there, as much as to say, "Well, go ahead! - - get it all out of your system! - - what's the next question? - - what else do you want to know?".....so in this question-and-answer period, this interplay between the disciples and Jesus: "All right, Jesus -- we've given up everything -- we've decided to follow you. What are we going to get out of it?"

You know me well enough that this is not to be construed as an irreverent gesture, or even intimation. But I think at this point I can picture Jesus standing, and maybe scratching the back of His head, or stroking His beard. He said, "Peter, that's a good question, and I'm glad you asked it. Now, if I'm to answer your question, Peter, bear with me for a little while because I want to tell you about something that I once saw - - - " - - and there and then Jesus told them a story. You can find it for yourself recorded in the 20th chapter of Matthew as the Parable of the Landowner and the Laborers. Bear with me for a moment - - allow yourself, rightfully so, a sanctified imagination.....

- - I think Jesus might have said, "You know what, Peter,

- - years ago I was given the job in the carpenter's shop to

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deliver a yoke of oxen, and as I took the yoke I had to go through the market-place...and when I went through the market-place I found a group of people gathered together, and just as I appeared there came a man, as everybody in that community knew him - - he was the wealthy land-owner who lived over at the other edge of town. And when he came to where these people were I heard him say it - - he said, 'What are you doing here? Why are you idle?' - - and they gave the answer, 'Well, we're idle because nobody came to hire us.'

(You can picture this, now, a little bit better, if you've ever been down, well if you go to work tomorrow passing Georgia and Alaska -- you'll see the labor pool of this area, those fellows hanging around, hoping that some construction foreman will come and take them away to a job and at least give them a day's work.) Well, that's exactly the kind of a situation this was in Nazareth - -

....and Jesus said, "I was intrigued by this, and the answer and his question, and I was exceptionally impressed because after I had delivered the yoke of oxen I came back, and the sun had set.....and here was this group of people, only a much larger group than I'd seen earlier. And Peter, you never heard such arguing in all your life! That land-owner had a problem on his hand, because he was paying them off, and everybody was getting the same amount of money - -

...now upon interrogation, as I asked some questions, Peter, I discovered that this land-owner had come three times before the

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time I saw him appear -- that was the last time he came -- but three times earlier he had come and made an agreement with these people to go and work for him. Some worked about an hour, I understand, some worked all day, some worked a half-day.....but when he came to pay them off, they all got the same wage, and you should have heard them all arguing. And then, Peter, the land-owner said, 'All right, you fellows, you made the agreement with me, and you got paid. That was the agreement - - I kept my bargain, you kept yours - - that's it! - and also I want you to understand that I'm still the land-owner, and I can still do things the way I think they ought to be done. I really haven't harmed anyone.'"

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I ought to say quite parenthetically to all of you that this account as you'll read it in the 20th chapter of Matthew won't stand up as any treatise on economics or labor conditions. Union leaders could tear it to shreds. But Jesus did not pose as an expert on economics or labor relations. He was talking here about a relationship between God and people. Basically He was talking about a philosophy of life, and a day's work, and what you could expect to get for it in the end. As He told this parable He was likening the land-owner to God! - and I think Jesus might have said:

"As I walked away, Peter, I reflected to myself, and I thought to myself that this is the drama which is life itself. It unfolds daily - - "

- - occasionally it comes in a bolder chapter with a severity that brings out the philosopher in each of us. The

issue eventually is made plain, and the question is put:

"What's to be made of this thing called Life?"

For the Christian there is, mark you, the basic premise that God's in charge, that life belongs to Him. As long as man can operate within the framework of this reference, his difficulties can be minimized. It's only when he ignores or forgets this tenet that it all bogs down for him, since man was never designed to handle Life solely on his own terms.....so Jesus gives an answer to Peter, What are we going to get out of it?

There are a lot of people who never quite raise the question, honestly! And because they've never really raised the question they've never really gotten the right answer. So God's Great Galilean, wandering up and down Judea and Galilee, every now and then would stop and wrestle with this tremendous truth with people, and always writing into it clearly the fact of God. But you and I forget. We spend all of our energy, day by day, trying to grasp onto things, and we allow ourselves to live by a secularistic and materialistic culture, as though this world were the only world, and as though there were nothing ever beyond eating, drinking, sleeping, buying and selling.

When I go back to the hills of home I have opportunity to visit with my family. I've never quite been the preacher to my brothers and sisters that I wish I could be, because when we have a little session and they lay bare their souls, from the limited vantage-point that God has given me, again and again I can find out and theirs is Exhibit A that their life is bogging down because occasionally they've forgotten to allow God to order the days of their years on His terms. And that precisely is the trouble with all of us. The happiest moments I've ever known in my own life were when I've been able to

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remember that God should be in complete charge. It's when I become unduly ambitious, it's when I level off horizontally and forget the vertical dimension that I have all kinds of problems on my hands.

Well, Peter, thank you for raising the question. Some men are to be remembered because they raised the right question, and gave enough of us a chance to look for an answer - - an answer, happily enough, which can come through Jesus Christ. And to that end, my friend, I am giving my life and my energy, if you don't mind, trying to limp along with you on the highway of Life - - to make certain that somehow, somewhere, we get the echo of His voice, until we learn the basic lesson that Life runs best when we allow Him to stay in charge.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Fifteenth Sunday After Trinity September 14, 1969

"WHEN EVIL RUMORS SPREAD"
(II Corinthians 6:8-10)

MAKE us silent before Thee, O Lord, that it could be your voice that would be heard. Feeble as the echo might be in this place and in this time, yet may we recognize Thy claim upon us. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

For a number of years now we've been setting aside a Saturday in September in which we invite people who are caught up in any way with the committee structure or the leadership role of this congregation to attend what we refer to as a Parish Convocation. Ordinarily we gather together and we talk about the program, the plans and the purpose of what we believe God puts in front of us as we engage ourselves in another chapter in time.

This year, however, we took no look at program whatsoever, but we did something that was pasically primary. We talked about the worship life of the Church.

You may remember that last Sunday reference was made to the fact that worship must be the central thrust of our gathering together as a group of Christians. The health of any congregation depends upon the vitality that we know as we gather together in an hour such as this.

We spent the greater part of the morning and the afternoon talking about worship. It was a perfectly beautiful day. We were on the campus of our Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg. It was Pennsylvania. The leader was a very able, stimulating chap, and the entire group was caught up with the kind of thing we were trying to do.

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We talked about the Order for Worship itself. It has different parts, you know.....

> ...the call which prompts our coming together must also be recognized as a very important incidental in the Order for worship...
>
> ....then the Preparation, the Proclamation of the Word, our Response through our prayers, our gifts at the altar, our re-commitment of our lives to Jesus Christ....

...then if the Sacrament should be offered, the recognition of the sacrifice which God made once and for all for us in the redemptive deed in Jesus Christ.

Well, in the afternoon we broke up into five sections, and each section was charged with the responsibility of giving a detailed study to a particular part of the worship order, and hopefully to come up with some kind of a suggestion that might warrant a revision of an Order for Worship which we might experiment with at one Sunday during just one hour in the course of the day, so that all of you might have the benefit of what we struggled with in our attempt to appreciate all over again what we're able to do every Sunday when we come.

I happened to sit in with the section, having been assigned to it, that dealt with the Proclamation of the Word, basically the reading of the Lessons, the preaching of the sermon. As a golden cord tying all of our deliberation together was the thought: How can we make the Liturgy come alive? How can vitality be the basic characteristic of all that we do in this hour? How can we make it increasingly meaningful? - - so they offered suggestions as to what might be done to enable you to pay greater attention, to the Lessons, as an

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example, when they're read.....they were given to understand that no holds were to be barred when it came to talking about the sermon. What could this group say to any preacher as to the place of the sermon in the proclamation of the Word?

Because we were from a specific congregation, we dealt with it specifically. That, naturally, should be understood. One suggestion was that maybe the sermon would be much more effective if the preacher would not stand imprisoned behind this encasement which is called a pulpit, and that maybe if/in the preaching of the sermon he walked away from the pulpit and he started down into the nave, and as the preacher wandered into the nave he would stop at this pew, and stop at that pew, and look each of you straight in the eye, with a very searching kind of look, as though you were to be given to understand that what the preacher was saying now was being meant directly and specifically for you....

> ....well, what the person didn't know who made the suggestion is that this sort of thing does happen occasionally -- it happens quite frequently on Ash Wednesday in the course of the day....and it happens quite frequently during the Vesper Period when we have an unstructured Hour.....

...but he was referring to a Sunday morning service.

Well, While I'm not about to do it, as much as I may respect the suggestion, the intention of the suggestion cannot be ignored, and I would earnestly hope and pray that every time this preacher goes to the pulpit, even though he's standing in one set place, you could have the feeling that he's speaking to you, and to you alone. I do prepare my sermons with that fact in mind, as though I were having dialogue and conversation with just one person. Now if in the preaching of any sermon you might happen to feel that this one person to whom the

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preacher is speaking happens to be you, you probably could be right!

Another suggestion that was made was that perhaps the sermons increasingly would give a sense of direction to a person, as to how to handle contemporary problems. The person who made the suggestion was wise enough not to say, give precise answers, but to give a sense of direction to the person wrestling with the problem that he might come upon the answer himself.

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It is no small thing to point out a sense of direction: This is the way--walk ye in it - - - to introduce the basic fact of Jesus Christ who said, "I am the way." I honestly confess to you, that no matter how feeble my efforts may be, I would hope that this kind of thing is being accomplished, to give you not so much precise answers, as a sense of direction, and that this should happen Sunday after Sunday.

Significantly enough, the sermon that's being preached today, as it was intimated months ago as the schedule for September through next June was put on paper, gives me an excellent opportunity to level with you precisely at this point, because I do want to talk to you about this whole matter of handling ~~m~~ problems that's come to every one of us. And the problem is, how to handle this business of what people say about us.

Recognize it, my friend, you are being talked about. Whatever your condition, whatever your situation, your circumstance - - at some time or another, in one place or another, for one reason or another, with or without justification - - - you're being talked about.....if not in a series of telephone conversations, then perhaps in the kind of thing that might take place at the Sunday dinner table today, only a matter of hours away.

I can't tell you who it was who said it, nor can I tell you exactly how it

was said, but I'm going to try. Somebody once said, didn't he, that

"Little minds talk about people - -
Ordinary minds talk about things - -
Big minds talk about principles, and ideas, and values."

Most of us are quite little, and we might be surprised at the amount of time we spend in talking about people.

I wish I could tell you that it doesn't matter what people say about you. But I can't. My experience as a pastor has proven that some people have been destroyed by the unkind way and the untruthful way by which people have talked about other people....

> ...there are some folks who have had to change jobs, they've had to resign, just because of evil rumors that were spread either in the office or in the shop....
>
> ...there are some people who have had to move out of town and begin all over again, hoping that a past characterized by evil rumors would not catch up with them in their new situation.....
>
> ...some people have lost their sanity completely, and occasionally you'll find somebody who has taken the 'back door' out of life, just because there were those who destroyed him by what they said, or the countenance they gave to what other people said about them.

Most of us may find ourselves in a situation, as Richard Bridgley Sheridan portrays in his "School For Scandal".....a group of women are together, one woman discovers that she has to leave before the party breaks up. With an air of omniscience, as she leaves the room she pauses at the door and turns back

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and says, "I go, but I leave my reputation behind me."

I cannot tell you that it doesn't matter what people say about you. It does matter. But what does one do in the face of it? He ought to face it quite realistically, he ought to admit that there are things being said about him. And oddly enough, we have a way of knowing, and one's antenna doesn't have to be unusually sensitive to be able to pick it up. Well, to begin with, you may have to admit that this is a fact of life.

The second thing that a man ought to do when he realizes that there are people who talk about him, unfairly and without truth, he ought to say to himself, as he might be able to say, well, I'd better meet this head on. I'm indebted to an old pastor, he used to say to me, "Nip the thing in the bud." ....well, that's quite alright, if in your attempt to do it people will listen. But there are some people who don't want to believe the truth, there are some people who don't want to hear your side of the story.....so stained are we by original sin that this remains the upshot of the matter.

But if a man could nip it in the bud, if he could set the story straight, if the party spreading the evil rumor has any integrity at all, he might hear the other fellow out. And if he doesn't, well there's a rule of thumb that's given some people: Try to talk with some people who spread evil rumors maybe once or twice, and if they haven't heard you the second time, then don't bother going back the third time. Save your energy.

Having done all of this, there are still some other things that a man needs to say to himself. One could be, well, why do they spread these evil rumors, why will they allow this traffic in what's unfair and unkind, if not untrue? Would you believe me if I were to tell you, for the simple reason that this is the only way that some people have of making themselves secure. Any

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psychologist will tell you — it's such a typical thing that there are some people who have a measure of security only as they trample other people under their foot, only as they speak disparagingly of others. That's the only kind of security that some people ever know, by keeping somebody else just a little bit lower than they, or allowing themselves to believe the sordid and the mean and the ugly thing.

Another thing that a man might be able to say to himself when he realistically deals with the fact that people are talking about him is that there are some people who talk about other people simply out of prejudice....

"I do not like you, Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell;
But this I know and know full well,
I do not like you, Dr. Fell."

...that's a nursery rhyme's explanation of the basic fact of prejudice in people's minds. And so because they are prejudiced, more than not they'll deal with the unfortunate and the ugly and the unkind. It's extremely difficult for any man who is prejudiced to see anything good or to think anything good about the person against whom he's prejudiced.

And the other thing that a man might say to himself is, well, if they continue this traffic in what's evil, unfortunate, unkind and untrue, it's because they're doing it out of ignorance, they just don't know. You could build a case for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the basis of evil rumors that were spread throughout a people, and a nation, and a church....so much so that in His dying moments He could say, recognizing the ugly result of what had happened, "Forgive them - - they don't know the facts - - they don't know what they've done."

Still to be said before you go, that maybe it isn't so important what other people say about you as it is important what you say about yourself. What do you

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think of yourself? Professor William Hocking of Harvard used to say:

"There's a deep tendency in human nature to
become like that which we imagine ourselves to be . . "

Well, we Christians are fortunate, we can turn to the Good Book. This sermon gets its inspiration from an experience in the life of a tent-mender-turned-preacher. You can read it for yourself in the 6th chapter of his second Letter to the Corinthians. Bless his soul! He just went on from day to day mending those tents and preaching those sermons. And every now and then he'd stop long enough to balance with facts the despicable things that some people were saying about him. People will talk, you know, and too often will they talk out of ignorance or prejudice. If the chap being slandered would give it too much heed he could lose his integrity, and maybe his sanity as well.

Now here's the Apostle Paul reflecting - - I'm going to paraphrase it for you. You can read the exact record for yourself in the Bible that you take in your hands tonight ere you go to bed - -

"People say I'm a deceiver. Well, what are the facts in the
case? There are those who know that what I stand for is
absolutely true.....
There are people who belittle me, because they say I'm a nobody.
And yet, what are the facts in the case?"
...and then he may have recalled all the Christians
to whom he ministered, and all the congregations that
he established, and all the people who when they went
to bed at night, thanked God that they had found him
as an agent of God's truth and grace....
There were people who said, He's a sick man -- he's dying on his
feet. "Alright," says the Apostle Paul, "As dying -- but I'm very

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much alive!" - - no one knew it better than they, and particularly when they let him down in the basket, when they left him half-dead after they had stoned him - - so he could go on and say, they may try to chasten me, but I'm not killed -- that's the fact in the case....

There were people who said he was always carrying a sad face because he was overcome by the sin in the world....

...but said the Apostle Paul, "Why, I'm always rejoicing. Down deep in my soul there's joy!".....

There were people who wrote him off because they said he didn't have anything, he didn't have a livlihood, he was a poor man.

"Yet," he said, "The fact in the case is that I have been able to make many people rich, rich in the spirit."

And then he also said, "They also said that I don't have a thing." And maybe he looked upon himself and saw only this cloth that was draped around him, but he said, "I have everything, everything in God."

Well, while it's important what other people say about you, far more important is what you say to yourself and what you say about yourself. I'm forever indebted to a member of this parish who, when I had to do battle at this very point, without saying a word slipped into my hand a card on which these lines were written:

"If you can keep your head
when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when
all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting, too;

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If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
or being lied about, don't deal in lies --
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

- - - - -

If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools . . . "

...well, you know how Kipling went on to end it. That may hold you in good stead, my friend.

Well, that's the last thing that needs to be said. It isn't so much what other people say about us. It's quite important what we say about ourselves.

But of far greater importance is trying to find out what God says about us. And what does God say about you? What does He say about me?

God says, "You're my child."

But that isn't all that He says. God says, "You're my sinful child."

...if one wanted to wax parenthetical for the moment, maybe God could also say, "Andtthere really isn't a great deal of good that can be said about you, at least from My viewpoint. But I gave My Son Jesus Christ to die for you, and I put the mark of the redeemed upon you. . . "

Now that's what God says about us.

And if that isn't enough to put a spring back into a man's step and enable him to hold his head high, when evil rumors spread - - then I don't know what is.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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"A MAN NAMED MATTHEW"
(Matthew 9:9)

You know, of course you do, that in the reading of any text there's always more then what meets the eye. You'll keep that in mind, won't you, as I read the text for this sermon now? You'll find it recorded as the 9th verse of the 9th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

> "And as Jesus passed from thence he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him."

That's the way Matthew recorded it long after the event had taken place. But you don't think that it happened just like that, do you? Dare we honestly believe that a carpenter's son who decided to become a preacher, as he felt God's claim upon his soul, wandering around from town to town, suddenly passes a tax collector who is busy with his books....looks down at him and says, "Why don't you get up and come after me?"....and then the tax collector, without so much as saying a single word, gets up from his desk and walks away, never again to return to the desk, and then becomes a follower of Jesus Christ..... ...who one day took a pen in his hand and wrote an account of the life and teachings of his Master. That 9th verse of the 9th chapter of Matthew's account reads like this:

> "And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, seated at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose . . ."

Looking at it now, years later, quite subjectively and with an attempt to be objective, Matthew said, "That's the way it happened."

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But in the reading of any text one must always look for more than what meets the eye at first glance. Let's do that right now. Let's begin to wonder, as well we might, that this thing took place at all, because any text has to be seen in its context. What had just happened? Before Jesus Christ saw Matthew, what had taken place?

Quite frankly, He'd been given a mighty tough time by some people who should have known better. They had made it very hard for Jesus Christ. He had done the most wonderful thing that could ever happen to anybody. As God-come-to-us, Jesus Christ had said to a man, "Your sins are forgiven" . . . and then, mark you, some church people tore the preacher, the miracle-worker, to shreds, ridiculed Him, made light of Him.

It's one thing to be taken to task for doing what you know is right -- it's another thing to be taken to task for doing what you know God wants you to do. Most of us, having experienced something as the nature of this thing that Jesus Christ had to go through, would wash our hands of human beings, and say, what's the use, if people who ought to know better react like this, what future is there in the kind of thing that I know God has placed in front of me?

Well, you're talking about Jesus Christ, remember. And Jesus Christ remains the undiscouragable one. Even though He received this kind of treatment, He still went on down the street, still pursuing His god-given obligation to recruit people for the Kingdom. And as He was walking down the street, this undiscouragable Christ, in this unseemly situation, finds a person, to all other eyes he is an unlikely candidate, and it's to him that He says, "You'd better get up -- you'd better try it my way. Follow me."

You know something about Matthew's day's work, don't you? Any student of history is aware of the fact that as a publican he was engaged in a despised occ

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occupation. No tax collector is ever popular, and particularly so if you're exacting tribute in behalf of an occupying authority. Nobody enjoys being occupied by a foreign power - - and then to know that that foreign power can come in and lay its finger upon certain people, of your own kind, and then they in turn exploit their new situation and bleed their own people dry ....because that's the way you can analyze the role of a publican. He was a tax collector who set his own rate. How would you like to pay taxes to somebody in whose mercy you remained forever?

> ...he would set the rate, and hav a sliding scale, and in the meantime who knew that he had to return only so much to the authorities, and all above that would be a gravy train to him....

...that's the kind of a day's work Matthew was doing - - not a very likely candidate for the Kingdom of God.

It's this 9th verse in the 9th chapter of Matthew that we can well afford to read repeatedly. Keep reading it, my friend, until it becomes crystal-clear to you, and troublesome, too! Christ got His man that day:

> not byiinterviewing a batch of expertly trained theological students;

Christ got His man that day:

> not by launching a recruitment attempt among Bible scholars as such;

Christ got His man that day:

> not by conducting a seminar for church deacons.

Any or all of the above, I would honestly believe, could supply a promising numbe But the jolt comes in the sobering truth that Matthew was none of these. Rather

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He was found in a most unlikely place and engaged in a rather despised occupation.

Do you want to know how some of us preachers talk to ourselves? Again and ever so often I've made this pulpit a kind of confessional booth. I have very unsettled feelings when I realize that I am one upon whom holy hands have been laid, and I wear the vestments which represent the Office of the Ministry. And I'm endeavoring to give my life with all the energy that God allows, telling people about Jesus Christ, believing that they are less than their full maturity until they become a new man in Christ. But I'm forever being jolted, I'm forever being unsettled and sobered, by the thought that when Jesus Christ was here on earth, and He recruited those into whose hands He was willing to rest the Kingdom, He never so much chose a single preacher as such! Every single one of them, to a degree at least it could be said....

...were not formal students of the Scriptures

...were not church leaders recognized in that capacity

I shudder to think how often He might have gone out to the periphery to get the kind of person that He found.

So on this day in the calendar of the Church which commemorates St. Matthew, Apostle, Evangelist, there's a sobering thought - - he was found in an unlikely place, in an unseemly situation. But mark you this and mark it well, Matthew puts it properly - - He came and He saw a man - -

- - Jesus Christ was not dealing in labels...

- - Jesus Christ was not dealing in images....

- - Jesus Christ was not dealing in situations

...He simply saw a man.

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I'm quite frank when I say to you that I don't know how often Jesus Christ saw people and said to them, "Follow me" - - and they did. I can't tell you how successful His batting average with human beings was. I only know that one day He did come into a place like this, and He saw a man that other people had passed by. And as long as men can take a Bible and hold it in their hands they'll treasure and cherish the name Matthew.

Jesus Christ saw him not only for what he was, but for what he could become. The word of warning holds all of us in good stead. We who are so quick to label people, we who are so quick to keep them at safe distance when they're not exactly our kind, might do well to remember Matthew. He was a social outcase, he was a social leper.

You'll brand me as being unrealistic - - some of you might dare me to try it, and if you should, I'd invite you to go along....

> ...suppose I left this pulpit right now, and I said, in the tradition of Jesus Christ, in the spirit and the mind of the Master, "Let's go looking for recruits for the Kingdom."
>
> - - would you dare me to take you into unlikely places?
>
> - - would you dare me to talk to unpromising people?

I only know the world has never been the same since a carpenter's son exercised a God-given-dare and found a whole company of Matthews!

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Seventeenth Sunday After Trinity September 28, 1969

"PAGEANT OF TRIUMPH"
(Ephesians 4:1)

Whenever the Bible societies put on a campaign to get people to read the Scriptures more frequently than they do, they usually tell us that the Bible is easily read, and easily understood. Don't they make much of the fact that you'll find very few words in the Bible that are more than two syllables in length, that they seem to believe that just because the language of the Bible is that simple, that anyone who reads the Bible can readily understand and agree with what's being said, particularly so if he places the Bible in the hands of someone who knows himself to be a believer.

I'm not so sure that what I have said is a fair statement. While it may be true that the Bible is easily read, I'm not so certain that it could be said that it's easily understood. At least one can say this about certain passages, and that's precisely what I have in mind. As an example: a quotation that some of us cherish, words spoken as words meant to be re-assuring, in any time of trouble, trial or tribulation:

"There shall no evil befall thee."

I have thrust upon me, as you know, the obligation to assign verses for our Confirmation Class. Traditionally it's a very wonderful thing, hopefully that a youngster assigned a Confirmation verse will so memorize it that in the years to come he might recall -- - just the very recollection of that verse, it might hold him in good stead when all the force of Evil is arrayed against him.

When I read the Good Book and go looking for Confirmation verses, occasionally I take a second deep breath when I come upon a verse like this, for the

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youngster, you see, is 13 - 14 years of age. I come along with four decades tacked upon my life, and I who read the Bible, then, with the thought to choose a Confirmation verse, choose these verses in the light of my four decades beyond their tender years.....and I take a second and a deep breath when I assign a verse such as this, "There shall no evil befall thee."

...for anyone who has lived any length of time at all knows that life just seems to go from one trouble to another.

When I began my ministry I went to console a woman whose property was by the river front. The Susquehanna had overflowed its banks, had taken away her rich topsoil, and had brought a great deal of damage to their 100-year-old brick house that had been a beauty spot. She was up in years. I was young. I felt in duty bound to console her and I said, "It's a pity...it's a pity...it's a pity....and I am so sorry that this had to happen and that it had to happen to you." Her simple reply was, "Well, Pastor, if it hadn't been the flood it could have been something else." And that's the way some people read life, life is just one troublesome thing after another.

Now counter-balance that with that verse in the Scriptures:

"Ten thousand shall fall at thy
right hand, but there shall no
evil befall thee - - "

...take the words just as they appear, only two words in that verse that have two syllables, none more than that....easily read.....but easily understood? The facts of life seem to be stacked up against it. For where is the saint, the committed one, whose devotion far outruns yours and mine, who will say that God stands always in front of him with a giant-size umbrella in that divine hand to shield him from all evil, all harm, all danger? So we go on praying, so we go on

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believing, so we go on pleading -- "God, don't let it happen to me." We permit ourselves to believe that just because we've committed ourselves to Him, that while it could happen to others, it won't happen to us.

If you think a pastor's load is an easy one, you're mistaken, my friend. For there are extremely difficult moments in his life, even in his desire to provide a pastoral ministry, to bring comfort and consolation. Example?

> ..."She was so good, Pastor, I don't remember that she ever spoke an unkind word....I never had any trouble with her at all...she always was home when she was supposed to have been home and we're always pleased with the kind of person she brought home with her. Tell me -- why did she have to be victimized? -- why did her body have to be defiled? -- why did she have to be hurt?"

...or if it isn't an act of violence:

> "Pastor, why did she have to be killed in that accident?"
>
> ..."Why did he have to die when he was so young?"

...and then in an unrestrained way usually they rail out against me -- "Where's your Gospel now of the goodness of God? Where are those everlasting arms that you're always talking about? Where is this eternal God who is said to be our refuge?"

...and then impatiently they name off certain people, that if they had their way they'd get rid of at once -- "They waste their years, they're a discredit to society, and they go scot-free." The upshot of the matter is, "If God's almighty, they why isn't He good? Why doesn't He protect us? Why doesn't He keep us from

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trouble?"

...you walk where I have to walk sometime, and have that thrown at you.

Well, I still keep the Bible in my hands, and I read it.

And as I read it I go on turning the pages of the Bible, and I've lived long enough to turn the pages of the Bible as though I were turning the pages of the book called Life. And there on almost every page I find it:

...trouble....trouble.....double trouble....

...it's real. No one escapes it -- no one, saint, sinner alike. Not even those "special ones" whom God seems particularly to have marked. You'd think, wouldn't you, that they'd be entitled to some kind of immunity. But that's one thing evidently that God's never allowed Himself; an immunizing needle reserved for saints! But to the contrary, the carpenter's-son-turned-preacher said to those who would come after him, "Take up your cross, and follow me."....and if a cross isn't a troublesome thing, I don't know what is.

But I frankly admit, my friend, the extract for this sermon that appears in the bulletin that you have in your hands and the front of this week's MESSENGER is only part of the story. It ought never to stand alone. By deliberate intent it was put there that you might know that the Bible is realistic, that the Bible does tell it as it is. It doesn't glows over the fact that life can be troublesome, and that life can be evil. But that's only part of the story. As you turn the pages of the Bible you come face-to-face with certain people whom God raised up, who are the valiant and the gallant ones, who knew what to make of trouble, and how by divine help to transform the situation in which they found themselves.

You know, don't you, as you read the Scriptures, that when Jesus Christ promised us that there would appear -- what was His name? -- the Comforter, the

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Helper, the Enabler. You remember your Latin, don't you -- to comfort means to be made strong -- to stand up to something. -- the Helper to give you divine assistance so that you might be made equal to the thing that confronts you.

What can I say to you now that may hold you in good stead as over against this frank admission that life is never without some taint of evil? You know, in the land of the East, and the Persians in particular, they made much of the fact that there were two forces in this world: Light and Darkness, and they were always operative. The Good Book makes much of that fact, too — we who cherish the Scriptures --

GOD - - - THE DEVIL

GOODNESS - - EVIL

...but if we stick with the Scriptures long enough, and if we follow Jesus Christ earnestly enough, we're in duty bound to come to the conclusion that evil is never anything more than second -- God always comes out first.

Having said that, what else can I say to you? I'm not so sure that I'd waste time trying to explain the fact of evil, or the recurrence of trouble. I don't know that you'll ever be able to figure it out. When I gave myself, several years ago, to that study of the Lord's Prayer, I wrestled long and earnestly with the petition: Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil -- and I found it a salutary thing to begin with evil and trouble at the very same place that Jesus Christ did -- He accepted it as a fact. I only know that trouble exists....I only know that evil is real....I only know that any life worth living will inevitably have its obstacle course to run.

Now, what else can be said? Say that that is true, then as a Christian

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we are in duty bound to remember that we are a people under orders and that we are meant to be faithful, come wind or weather -- we are meant to be obedient to Him whose we are, and Whom we serve. If the night is dark and the way is long, we are meant to be faithful. Jesus Christ said, "Follow me" in the same breath He talked about bearing a cross. If you read again that Epistle lesson for today, you ought to gain a great benefit from it. Here was this man Paul, who was giving himself so completely to following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, and as often as he did it he got himself in a peck of trouble. No matter where he went, evil was being raised against him....

...even the forces of nature plagued him. He'd set out in a boat -- he'd run the risk of becoming shipwrecked....

....he'd preach in a community -- and he ran the risk of being stoned and left half-dead....

...he'd go on his way trying to take the Gospel to the Imperial City -- and they threw him into jail....

...all right, he finds himself in jail -- trouble and evil is real. But the paramount thing remains: he must be faithful -- so that you get this magnificent statement of the Apostle Paul, the opening verse of the Epistle Lesson for the Day:

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord -- "

He was a prisoner of the Roman authorities, that's what he was -- they put him there. And in the face of that, "I shall consider myself the Lord's prisoner. While I am here I will do everything that I was meant to do"....and that's exactly what he did.

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There in the prison, he found himself a kind of a pulpit, and he spoke to people who went back and forth - - so that when he was released they were able to say that the name of Jesus Christ was known throughout the area. He wrote letters, from that prison cell...gave a measure of comfort and reassurance to some of those Christian congregations he'd established. In the face of his trial and his trouble and his tribulation, he remained faithful.

Well, maybe that's the word that you and I need to cherish today. I give you no assurance that your life will be a bed of roses. I give you no assurance that that divine hand protects you with a giant-size umbrella. I only know that God who reads the fact of life: "I will be with you" - - the Comforter....the Helper.....the Enabler.

Now one parting word. It could be that if you wanted to spend the rest of the day writing, and we would treat one another with respect and patience, every single one of you could talk about the trouble in your life -- the trouble you've had, and figuratively speaking, haven't all of us come to this place dragging behind us a number of things, (to use a Scriptural phrase) "that so easily beset us"?

But once the night has been spent and you have been able to draw upon the spiritual resources, there's a refinement of character, isn't there, in the face of the trouble you have had and the way you've seen it through, by the grace of God.

Didn't I read somewhere that the coach who meets his team for the first time...."Now the first lesson we have to learn on the field today, how to fall, and then to rise again."

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord - - "

said the Apostle Paul. Trouble, it's real. But the Scriptures also introduce us to the fact that man was made to stand up to it, not by himself, but by the strength that enables us to overcome. If you can't take my word for it, then why don't you take Paul's?

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Communion Meditation - Pastor Shaheen
The Eighteenth Sunday After Trinity October 5, 1969

OUR THIS-ALSO GOD

He was the richest man in town, and that meant a great deal to those of us who were young. We made it a habit, whenever we knew he was coming to town, to sort of be around, because it was quite a thrill, those 45 years ago, to see him driving into town with that - - what looked like the finest chariot this side of Heaven - - it was a black Packard with all those fine shiny accessories that only a rich man could afford. And then we'd notice how he would park in a special place that no one else dared use, in front of the office at the factory that bore the family name, A. H. Heilman and Company.

Sometimes during the summer weeks, when school would be out, we'd hang around, thinking that maybe he'd want a brief respite for himself and he'd tear himself away from the desk, and then he'd walk the single block across Broad Street to Weaver's Ice Cream Parlor -- it was the 'Gifford's' in that day in our town, and the sign outside Weaver's Ice Cream Parlor said, "We Serve The Velvet Brand."

Youngsters as we were, how embarrassing it must have been for him, surely not for us, we'd trail along behind him. And then <u>one</u> day, as he crossed Broad Street and headed into the entrance of the Parlor, he turned around and motioned to all of us, "come along"....and we followed in without any hesitation. And then he said, this richest man in town, "What do you want?" - - and of course we named it. .....and after we had gotten our ice cream cones and we were about to leave, he caught the eye of the proprietor and he himself

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reached up to the counter and over the shelf, picked out a box of something, and said, " - - and take this along, too."

You can readily understand how it left its mark upon the sensitive mind of a youngster. And in the reading of the Old Testament lesson for today I projected upon the eternal screen.....through these years I pictured for myself a God who on occasion out of His bounty says to us: "And what do you want?" We have our prize moments when we tell Him.

...then, according to the theme of the Old Testament lesson for today, God gives us not only that for which we ask but also He says, " - - and this, too, you may have."

We Christians are not the only people who believe in God. Across the face of the earth any number of people believe in a God. But if you want a descriptive this morning for the kind of God in whom we believe, we might very quickly say He is "This-also" God....."this-also" God. Because in that Old Testament lesson for today, when God was giving Solomon what he wanted, God said, "And this also you shall have." Again and ever so often this God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is saying to us, " - and this, also, you may have." That richest man in town could have stopped by just saying hello to us....he could have stopped by just giving us a single ice cream cone. But on that day he said, " - - and this, also, you can have - - take this with you."

Think for a moment of the different points at which God might have stopped in His dealing with us. God as Creator, having made the world, having called it good, having put us in it, having given us the world - - He

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could have stopped at that point. But He didn't. He is the God who says, "And this, also, you shall have." Being mindful of a continuing need in our lives, He who came as Creator also comes as Redeemer, and in our sinfulness He says, "This, also, you shall have - - a Saviour." He just didn't stop with creation.

There are some people who when they look at Jesus Christ see only an example of a good man, an outstanding teacher-preacher, miracle-worker. And all these He was. But God says, "And this, also, He shall be - - a Saviour." He might have stopped at creation, but this-also God says, You shall have a Redeemer.

We are frail creatures, we're limited in our understanding. Given a Saviour, we are still weak. This this-also God does not stop with the act of redemption. By His Holy Spirit He enables us to understand it, to be able to draw on the full benefit of all that He has done. So this-also God gives us the Sanctifier, the Enabler, the Comforter. Whenever you think of God revealed to us in Jesus Christ, look upon Him in that way, who says, "This, also, you shall have."

We are about now to receive the Sacrament of the Altar. I like to think of the Sacrament as being God's idea. He thought it up, He makes it possible for us, because these, too, we ought to have.....

...God brought us into this world, He gave us life...

...God sets before us the divine objective, eternal life....

...but He's not content just to give us the beginning and the ending. In the meantime, in our pilgrimage He also gives us all that we need by which to be sustained, and in the Epistle Lesson for the Day there's something

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classic -- you ought to read it carefully, because in the Epistle lesson there is a reference, "He who sustains you even unto the end." This-also God gives not only the beginning and the destiny, but the wherewithal by which to arrive, so that as you and I journey through life we can get lost on the way, but this-also God gives a renewed sense of direction. We who are meant to love and to be patient and to be kind run out of love, run out of patience, run out of kindness. So God through the Sacrament comes to us, gives us Himself by which we are nurtured and replenished.

I once knew a man who, wittingly or unwittingly, made a boy very happy. He was going to take a ride on the bus with his grandmother. The trip was to last at least five to six hours. They were to get on the bus around three o'clock in the afternoon. It meant they'd go clear through the supper hour, and that's quite an assignment for a little boy.....

....so the man who took them to the bus terminal also tucked away for the little boy, much to his surprise as he discovered on the journey, a couple of sandwiches and a candy bar and a cookie....

...nothing, perhaps,

to that little boy seemed quite as wonderful as to know that on that little journey of five to six hours there would be something to hold him over.....

Don't let your sophistication stand in the way, my friend. God through the Sacrament is holding us over, sustaining us on the way, so that we might arrive...As the this-also God who not only made us, waits for us at journey's end, but also sustains us on the way.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Festival of the Harvest — October 19, 1969

" - - OF COMMON MERCIES"
(Psalm 51:15)

With perhaps less than 5% of the people of this parish having anything so much as a garden, it is well that the church continues to keep in its calendar the Festival of the Harvest. For on this day we are reminded anew that it is from the Lord's bounty that we are sustained, that we live from day to day because of the fruits of the good earth. Let me read from a quotation from John Arnold which serves as an inspiration for all that I would talk about in this brief period now:

> "The world has seen the passing of many civilizations; but the harvest, which God ordained before any of them, has outlasted them all. The world has seen many wicked men; but the sun and the rain have not ceased to fertilize their fields. So the love of God endures through all time and all evil; nothing can stop Him from expressing it."

And this precisely is the thing that you and I must remember. In a day that's as unsettled as ours, in a day when the accent seems always to be upon the sordid, the ugly and the tragic, we must ask that our eyes be opened to the common mercies of God which go on from day to day.

There's a text for this meditation. You'll find it a portion of a very familiar Psalm. But before the text is read, I would do well to call to your attention that it's a very peculiar prayer. When you and I pray we talk to God about a number of different things, and occasionally when we come to pray it's that we want to ask God for a specific thing. This prayer is quite specific, but it has a very peculiar and a very strange request:

> "O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise."

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Examine the text carefully. Are we really as bad off as all that? Is man so stained by original sin that he finds himself in the situation where he has to come and earnestly ask God to open his lips? -- in order that man might tell God how grateful man is. Is this our situation, that we need the divine initiative, a suggestion from God? -- in order to turn to God and say, "God, thank you for your blessings."

With the pressures of life upon us, one can readily understand how we can become insensitive to the common mercies of God, and maybe a characterization for man is the characterization of a child. He's visiting in the home of a friend or a relative. The friend or the relative, recognizing the thing that could make a little child happy, gives a cookie, a piece of candy, a dish of vanilla ice cream.....

> ...and once this child has received this token of affection and concern, like as not it's the mother who reaches forth and touches the child, very graciously and quite properly - - - - "What do you say?"

Maybe all of us continue to remain as children in God's sight, needing the gentle prodding to remind us that the word that needs most to be spoken now is "Thank you, God." For shame upon most of us, we run our days blind and insensitive to the things for which we ought always to be giving God thanks. Why should this be so? Why is it so? Could it be, my friend, that there is so much of the sordid and the tragic and the ugly that we concentrate upon it?

Maybe we must learn to master the fine art of selection - - selection of

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the things upon which we're really going to focus. Maybe we must learn to take our eyes away from the ugly and the unfortunate and the untoward, and concentrate upon the goodness that remains. God has so ordained this world that there is always some token of His abiding love, somewhere, somehow, if only we have eyes to see it.

Martin Luther, bless his soul, tried to keep his courage up, but he too had his moments of depression. One day he said, "The world is so evil, it's about time that God had done with it" - - echoing, of course, the kind of mood that is typical of us on many an occasion. The same Martin Luther one day was greeted by his beloved Katherine VonBora....she was garbed in black as was the custom in that day when somebody died. And Martin is supposed to have said to her, "Katy, who died?" And she said, "The way you have been going around lately, with nothing but sadness written all over your face - - (almost a trace of bitterness, she could have added) - - I thought God had died."

God is very much alive, and He continues to shower even upon a wicked world dokens of His love and of His mercy. Maybe we'd better pray: "Dear God, open my eyes that I may see them - - help me to so discipline myself that I become selective, and concentrate upon the good things, the common mercies, that are still here."

There was a churchman some time ago who was caught up in the maelstrom of events that left him pretty well beat, but his head unbowed. Someone said, How was it possible for him to retain his sanity against all the inhuman things that had happened to him. And the reply came, "But Niestill has his home to

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which he can retreat night after night and day after day, a wife who loves him, and children who respect him."

...these, too, are the common mercies of God. Happy indeed is that person who concentrates upon them. Because life with its pressure of the ugly and the sordid is so great, we need to discipline ourselves to select the things for which a man can still say, come wind or weather, "For these I give you thanks, O God."

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There is another reason perhaps why we become insensitive to God's grace. Maybe it's the other side of the coin. Maybe it isn't so much because life has dealt a treacurous blow to us, but maybe up to this point we've faired so well -- we're doing very nicely --- everything is working out exactly as a man would dream. And up to this point in his life his self-reliance and his independence have paid off. There is a type of person like that. And because of his own energy, and his own initiative, he hasn't found himself in a place where he's about to thank anybody for anything.

A biographer being interviewed about his subject, remarked: "He was the kind of man who never asked favors of anyone; by the same token, he was seldom known to say thank-you." In my book, what a colorless person he must have been, and I'd be quick to nominate him for the character that I least admire.

But there are people like him. They go through life with never so much as a trained and sensitive eye for the countless grand and good things by which we are so graciously surrounded. Forgive a chap like that, of course you will, with avowed independence. Pity him, to be sure, his blindness which begets base ingratitude.

There may still be a third reason why we go through life insensitive to

God's goodness. It's because we may be inclined to look for something good far, far away, and fail to recognize the goodness of God which is immediate, right at hand. I always pity the person who thinks that only tomorrow is going to be the good day. I pity the person who thinks he has to go a thousand miles away to find some good thing. God brings His mercies close at hand. All too often we are blind to see them when they're within reach. Did you ever think what it must have been like in the carpenter's shop in Nazareth? Joseph had more than one lad. As an example, Jesus had a brother names Joses. In this vein someone once wrote:

"Joses, the brother of Jesus, was only a worker in wood,
And he could never see the glory that Jesus, his brother, could.
'Why stays he not in the workshop?' He often used to complain,
'Sawing the Lebanon cedar, imparting to woods their stain?
Why must he go thus rosming, forsaking my father's trade,
While hammers are busily sounding, and there is gain to be made?'
Thus ran the mind of Joses, apt with plummet and rule,
And deeming whoever surpassed him either a knave or a fool - -
For he never walked with the prophets of God's great garden of bliss,
And of all the mistakes of the ages, the saddest, methinks, was this - -
To have such a brother as Jesus, to speak with Him day by day,
And never to catch the vision which glorified his clay!"

Man's lot is so miserable that maybe he does have to pray: God, you'd better do for me what I can't quite seem to do for myself, you'd better open my lips, that I might know the great joy of praising you.

If I understand Martin Luther aright, in his treatment of the Creed in his Catechism, we couldn't possibly understand the mind of God if it weren't

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that God himself inspires us, enlightens us.

If you want to examine your prayer life, my friend, why don't you begin at this point and ask God to open your lips, to open your eyes, and in doing so, discover the joy that only the grateful heart can know.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
Reformation Sunday October 26, 1969

"THE CHURCH IN CHANGING SOCIETY"

He was a tent-mender-turned-preacher, mission developer, theologian, church administrator. He traveled a great deal throughout Asia Minor. At times he hugged the shore-line, on other occasions he went into the hill country. Like as not, he was to be found in the cities. No matter where he went, he listened, he observed life as closely as he could, its sordid aspects, its saintly aspects.

On occasion he'd take time to write a letter or two. He might write to some group of Christians who, by God's grace, had been able to gather together and to help form into a congregation. He'd give them a bit of advice, he'd give them a measure of encouragement. And then, in some great moment of reflection, he might sit back and size the whole thing up. Size what up? What was this whole thing that he'd size up? The Christian Church.

His name was Paul. He was a convert to the Christian faith. Whenever he'd talk about the church, he'd talk about it in glowing terms, never perhaps quite as eloquently as when he wrote the words that constitute the text that serves as the basis for today's sermon, 1 Timothy 3:15:

> " . . . the church of the living God, the pillar, the ground of truth . . . "

The first thing that you can say about that text is this: it's a good word for the Church, he's highly complimentary. And if you could have caught the tone in his voice, the look in his eye when he was writing, surely you would have detected a great measure of appreciation. Well this is an excellent point at which to begin right now. Notice that he's saying a good word about the Church.

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It would seem that as one reads the pages of history, that there have been times when the Church has been hard-pressed to have good things said about it. There are those who say that the Church is passing through such a time right now, when it's becoming increasingly difficult to find people who say good things about the Church.

I happen to be one of a group of people who honestly believes that some of our ablest church leaders in this day have not been able to live out their greater measure of usefulness because they have been caught up in the fire of those who cannot speak with appreciation for the cause of Jesus Christ as it's known through His Church. Not that they're not quite able to take it, that isn't the point. But their love and regard for the Church is so great that their spirits have become crushed - - not that they have been forced to alter their path, not that their preaching is anything less than the Gospel - - - but to see something that you love, something that you regard very highly, being cursed, ridiculed - - this is something else. That's why with a fair measure of a spring in my step I know a great measure of delight when I come upon these words of a man who was qualified to speak, when he said a good word about the Church.

As I stand before you now, I recall the words of our late President of our Lutheran Church in America, Dr. Franklin Clark Fry. You're entitled to a direct quotation:

> "No industry could survive the kind of flogging the church has been forced to take. If General Motors had to stand firm in the midst of the whipping that has been heaped on the church, that great corporation would have died long ago."

The national sport to criticize the Church continues, by those inside and outside the Church.

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But there are those who have spoken eloquently in defense of the Church. J. B. Phillips has written, in that magnificent little book "Your God Is Too Small" these sentiments:

> "Critics often complain that if the world is in its present state after 19 centuries of Christianity, then it cannot be a very good religion. They make two ridiculous mistakes. In the first place, Christianity -- the real thing -- has never been accepted on a large scale and has therefore never been in a position to control 'the state of the world', though its influence has been far from negligible.
>
> "And in the second place, they misunderstand the nature of Christianity - " (listen carefully) - "It is not to be judged by its success or failure to reform the world which rejects it. If it failed where it is accepted there might be grounds for complaint, but it does not so fail. It is a revelation of the true way of living, the way to know God, the way to live life of eternal quality, and is not to be regarded as a handy social instrument for reducing juvenile delinquency or the divorce rate. Any 'religion', provided it can be accepted by the majority of people, can exert that sort of restrictive pressure. The religion of Jesus Christ changes people (if they are willing to pay the price of being changed) so that they quite naturally and normally live as 'sons and daughters of God', and of course they exert an excellent influence on the community."

Can you take one more quotation? Gilbert K. Chesterton, who had a right to

speak:

> "Of course, the church has had failures, for it has attempted tremendous things. It has given modern civilization its mind, its conscience, its spiritual life, its noble institutions. It has tamed barbarians and wielded mighty powers. No wonder it has made mistakes, doing so great work! But atheism has no history. It has never been productive. It has built no institutions, created no cultures, enobled no peoples. Because it has no history, it has no errors, except for the final error of doing nothing."

So I stand among you this morning for only one purpose, to say a good word about the Church.

It's easy for me to say it because in moments of reflection it occurs to me, as it ought to occur to you, that the Church is not yours and the Church is not mine. The Church belongs to Jesus Christ. That's one reason why it's easy for me to say a good thing about the Church, because knowing who He is and what He's like and what He's about. I draw great measure of encouragement in my concept of the Church. Oh, it's so easy to look upon the Church purely from a human point of view, to zero in upon people like you and me. But if the Church depended only on people like you and me, God help us! - - and that's exactly what He does!

Because you and I are the Church, the kind of people who make up membership in the Church, and I don't have to tell you your weaknesses and you don't have to tell me mine. We are the sinful ones with whom Jesus Christ has to deal. We are the lame horse that we give Jesus Christ to ride, we are the rotten wood out of which He has to carve. Yet Jesus Christ says, "I still claim you. You still belong to me." - - and if that isn't an encouraging word, I don't know what is.

It's easy for me to sing the praise of the Church because I know that it's something that Jesus Christ still believes in. I don't know that He has any

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better plan for mankind. His preferred method of working is still through people, and the Church is made up of those whom He has chosen, and He happens to believe in us.

Now what else can I tell you about this great measure of enjoyment that I know when I think of the Church? And that's precisely what it is. I'm quite excited about the Church because it's the only agency, the only institution, the only fellowship that I know of that's constantly saying to people, "Come on in - - we have room for you! - - join us! - - respond to the claim of the Holy Spirit upon you! . . . "

...I don't know of any agency, any institution, any fellowship, whose arms are as outstretched, by divine intention, as is the Christian Church. Did it ever occur to you to recognize, quite really now, what a variety we are! This assembled company right now - - age....temperament....personality....disposition.....a variety of stages in our spiritual maturation. Yet the doors of the Church are open - - "Come on in!"

When we're invited to come in we're invited to come as a response, not simply as a group of people, not simply as a pastor or pastors of a congregation, but we're invited to come on in as a response to God's claim upon us. Every time a new member group is greeted for the first time and every time they're received, that principle is spelled out. We stand with one another because we recognize God's claim upon us. When we cast our lot together, it's a response to the Holy Spirit who has called us.

The Church as an agency, as an institution, as a fellowship, is unique. If when it invites people to come together, they say, "Let us worship the Lord

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our God - - let us give praise and honor to His Name" - - - worship remains central in the life of the Church, for a man is known by the things he reveres. Men's life is shaped by what he adores. And it's the Christian Church that's saying, "Come on in and give praise to Almighty God through Jesus Christ!"

I sing the praise of the Christian Church because it's the only agency, institution or fellowship that I know that says, "But you can't stay here once you've come together - - get out! get with it! be on your way! "

...it's no accident that ever so often when you're greeted in this place it's spelled out in this way that you might know the claim of God upon your soul, that you may go into the world and live effectively, empowered by His Holy Spirit. As significant as any part in the worship service is the benediction, which is God's way of saying: "Get on with it, now, and be assured that when you go I go with you - - My blessing continues."

I sing the praise of the Church because it's the only agency, the only institution, the only fellowship that I know that's always saying, even to those who walk at some distance, who become a part of the periphery, or who even become a drop-out - - the Church that says, "Come on in - - ".....the Church that says, "Give God praise - - ".....the Church that says, "Go and live - - "

.....the Church is also the only agency, the only institution, the only fellowship that I know that's saying to those who think they can go it by themselves: "But come on back! - - the candle remains in the window! - - the doors are still ajar!"

The Church of Jesus Christ alone provides the redemptive touch for sinful man. This is why I believe in the Church. Oh, I've lived long enough to know

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what some of you think, and I can't possibly ignore it. A man doesn't have to be good to belong to the church. Didn't St. Augustine also imply that not all the redeemed are in the church? - - not all the condemned are outside - - this I can recognize. Don't I also remember what Martin Luther once said, when a peasant was asked, "What do you believe?" - - and the peasant said, "I believe what the Church believes."..... Martin Luther was infuriated and used mighty strong language that went something in this vein: "Nonsense. A person who talks like that may not be saved!"..... because there must be this element of personal trust, this element of personal responsibility. It is simply never a case of blindly accepting what anybody believes, blindly accepting even what the Church believes. The Church is the only agency, the institution, the fellowship that I know that says to the doubter - - "We'll deal patiently with you, we'll surround you with love, and a measure of understanding." And well she should, because it's only within the Church is a man nurtured, by Word and by Sacrament. So I sing the praise of the Church.

I haven't come this morning -- by deliberate design I have not characterized for you the aspects of a changing society. Who is not overwhelmed by those facts himself, who cannot label them for himself? It is sufficient to say the Church is always found in the midst of a changing society. As society changes, the Church has a mighty fortress remains, and offers what in the plan of God is uniquely the Church's - - to invite....

...to winsomely call

...to motivate

...to become the channel of the dynamic, to offer the thrust.....and then continually to raise up the altar and the pulpit, without which a man in Christ cannot live.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
All Saints' Sunday November 2, 1969

"THE BLESSED"
(Matthew 5:1-12)

Greatest of all the early church fathers was Augustine. We do well to remember, however, that he was not always a saint. In the days of his youth he lived his life with reckless abandon. Perchance if you were to name any sin, he was not unfamiliar with it. But Augustine became a convert to the Faith. He numbered among the influences, the forces and the factors at work in his life one of his teachers, a teacher undoubtedly who was absolutely aware of the recklessness of the young man, much about him, undoubtedly, that was unattractive. Yet when the teacher dealt with Augustine he looked upon him as a person. Augustine never forgot that kind of treatment.

Also at work in the life of Augustine, unknown to him, was the fervent daily prayer of Monica, his mother, who never gave up praying that one day her son would be born anew to Jesus Christ. Surely Augustine was aware of her devotion and of her concern. No wonder, then, whatsoever, that when he wrote his Confessions he saw fit to record the words of his dying mother:

> "Lay this body wherever it may be. Let no care of it disturb you. This only I ask of you, that you should remember me at the altar of the Lord, wherever you may be."

Very properly the Church includes in its calendar All Saints' Day, which gathered together in this place, we now commemorate on this Sunday. James Garfield, 22nd President of the United States of America, also one of its four murdered chief executives, in a very eloquent address that he was delivering on one occasion said, "The dead do not need us; but forever and forever we need the dead." We do well to hold them in holy remembrance. The Church has an expression - - we refer to them as "the blessed dead."

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But I rise quickly to ask the question: Why should so apt a descriptive be given only to those who depart this life? The word blessed, of course, means to have the smile of God's favor rest upon one. What is there about human nature that we're inclined to think graciously primarily of those who have finished their course? Human as every single one of us is, the sharpness of our tongue concerning people becomes dull after a person has died. The clear-eyed vision by which we saw their faults becomes dim after they've died. Why is it we allow them their halo only after they've gone? Is this a weakness of human nature, that we can be kind, graciously-disposed, concerning people only after they are no longer with us?

To refer to the dead only as the 'blessed' is to commit an error. Scholars tell us that word blessed or bless-ed means "to have a link with the eternal" ....or a free translation could be, "to have the smile of divine favor rest upon you."

If I were not a Christian, I think there would be a number of different reasons that would attract me to the Christian religion...

> ...one, I think I would be attracted to the Christian faith because of certain people that I have met, who in this world have radiated the fact of Jesus Christ. There are some people who make it very easy for me to believe in Jesus Christ....their lives are as a mirror of His grace and of His beauty...
>
> ...if I were not a Christian, I think I'd be attracted to the Christian religion if I could come with a group of people such as you, and I could hear you sing, as my soul was fairly at tiptoe as I stood outside the chancel

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and heard the swelling strains of "For All The Saints Who From Their Labors Rest" - - - I think this in itself would also attract me to the Christian religion, to know that there is a religion that makes much of the fact that death is a translation into the very nearer presence of God, that death can be looked upon with joy, and as a matter of triumph and victory because of Jesus Christ.....

...if I were not a Christian, I am certain I'd be attracted to the Christian religion if someone were to place in my hands the Bible, the teachings of Jesus Christ. How I'd be caught up, undoubtedly, when I would read what was read as the Gospel lesson for the day - - the words of a carpenter's-son-turned-preacher who went around from village to village and tried to link up the eternal with the present moment, who told people who were miserably sad-eyed, imprisoned in this world, that they could have the hope of heaven - - who gave for them a series of "blesseds". You ought to read the Beatitudes carefully, my friend, note it at once - - He does not say "Blessed are they who have been" - - He does not say, "Blessed are they who will be". But He says, "Blessed are - - " He deals with the here and the now.

....I think I'd be attracted to the Christian religion when

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I would be brought face to face with someone who gives me to understand that the world of the eternal can be characterized by the present, and the now.....

As I looked forward to coming to this pulpit this morning, I extended the spirit of the passage of the Gospel lesson, and made it secure around a statement that constitutes the first verse of the first chapter of a letter that was written to a group of Christians who lived in a town called Philippi. Let me read the text for you now:

"Paul and Timotheus, servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi . . . "

....sounds rather idyllic, doesn't it? It sounds as though there had been transposed to this present world a bit of Heaven -- a particular group of people at a particular place --- saints, in a town called Philippi occupied by saints. Really now, was it as idyllic as all that? Were Paul and Timothy in an expansive and in a generous mood as they looked back to that group of Christians with whom they had been related, called them saints?

Come now, what would you think if I were to accept a mission overseas for a period of weeks or months, and I was separated from you -- still your Pastor, of course, but undertaking the special mission, I would be away for these weeks and these months. And in my absence, still wanting to be every bit as good a pastor as I want to be to you, I'd keep in touch with you. And so I'd write you a pastoral letter -- you, the people of this congregation, with whom I have been associated for four-years-plus-a-decade. What kind of salutation would I give you, knowing you as I do? Well, I might try:

"To My Co-workers in Christ in Saint Luke Congregation"

...or I might say:

"To My Friends in Jesus Christ, Members in Saint Luke Parish"

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....or I could say -- could I? - -

"To All The Saints in Saint
Luke Congregation:"

That's what the Apostle Paul did.

Some of you might say, if I were to use such a descriptive, "Pastor must have his tongue in cheek! - - calling us saints!" So some of you might think it a very restrictive thing, referring to you as saints, I might be deliberately excluding some, if you had that kind of a mind. Well, in the New Testament, you see, what does the word saint mean? Honestly now, it really means: A person given wholeheartedly to following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. It does not mean, in the New Testament, a perfect person. It means a person who is being made holy, it means a person caught up in the process of sanctification. So I could use the ascriptive for you:

"To The Saints in Saint
Luke Congregation:"

The text bears a close look, albeit very briefly:

"Paul and Timotheus, the servants
of Jesus Christ . . . "

....you will note that they did not refer to themselves as saints. They were willing to see a halo on other people's heads but not on their own. And that's right, because a man who is entitled to be called a saint never sees the halo on his own head, for the simple reason that his halo is something that's dropped down from Heaven above upon us, it's something that's bestowed, it's something that's given. No man ever earns a halo. He becomes the kind of person on whose head a halo could rest. So Paul and Timothy, good and honest men, did not presume to call themselves saints, but with spiritual perception they could discern the halo in the folks who constituted the Church at Philippi.

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"To all the saints in Christ Jesus
which are at Philippi - - "

Philippi? It wasn't an idyllic community, honestly it wasn't. It had all the vice and corruption and social ills of any community. But that's where these people who were called saints were living and working out their growth in grace, with the assistance of the Divine Spirit. Careful reading points out: "To all the saints in Jesus Christ" - - that's the important thing - - "in Jesus Christ" - - the link that can't be broken. It's Christ who sanctifies us. According to Lutheran theology, you know you're a sinner to the day you die. We are the community of the "sinning saints" and we falter, we stumble. But within the company of the redeemed there are always those who are saying, "Raise me up, Lord - - start me all over again - - let me have the divine shove of the Holy Spirit to keep me on the way - - " That's the way we talk.

Somebody has once said that a lawyer sees people at their worst, a preacher sees them at their best, a physician sees them just as they are. Aren't you glad that there are some of us who try to see you at your best? The older I become the more I recognize in the office of the ministry the God-given responsibility to see people in their noble intention. That's why, to the eyes of some of you, why perhaps I am far more charitable with some people than you would be. And by the grace of God I hope I always can be, because it's in the confessional booth that I learn and hear some things that you never hear. Some of you have no idea how hard it is for some people to be good! Some of have no idea how good some people really want to be! But with the force of evil clutching, it becomes exceedingly difficult in certain arenas of their life of which you have no idea whatsoever.

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So the saints are they who in this world have a halo resting upon them because it drops down from Heaven, but occasionally it drops from their head, and they step upon it, and they put it back....it may be tattered and torn and twisted, but God says the halo ought to be there.

When I was a student in Seminary I spent three wonderful years at Gettysburg. I went to chapel almost every day - - not that magnificent temple to God built in 1942, having the very wonderful name, "The Church of the Abiding Presence" - - but we worshipped in a small room in the Administration Building. Whenever I go back to Gettysburg and have opportunity, I seek out that hallowed spot. Unless you were a student there before 1942, you won't detect any trace of what had once been the chapel....the stained-glass windows have all disappeared...the chancel furniture is gone....the kind of an alcove that served as a kind of a chancel is still there however, serving as a kind of stage. But when I go there and I look, I see in my mind's eye what had once been a life-size painting of the Master and the twelve disciples....

....and when my mind would wander when the preacher would be preaching or the lecturer would be lecturing or the teacher would be teaching, I'd look at those life-sized characters. Even then I said to myself, they don't have Palestinian features, those twelve men, even though those twelve were Palestinian, Judeans, Galileans .....and I said also to myself, they don't have Da Vinci's Italian touch.

Then there was am man who at the time of his death was a member of this congregation when he lived here in retirement -- Herbert Christian Alleman, our Old Testament professor, who explained the whole thing to me. He had a former parishioner of a church that he had served in Philadelphia who made a gift to the Seminary, and by that sum of money they were able to commission an artist who had lived in Pennsylvania, and the artist was told to give a life-

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size canvas of the Master and the Twelve. So he painted the Master and the twelve disciples.

And I suppose if you knew the story, you might discover that Matthew, painted on that canvas, had the features of a harness-maker who lived in Hanover, Pennsylvania.....Andrew might have looked like the man who was a baker in York, Pennsylvania.....one of the characters might have had traced upon his face the features of a Pennsylvania Dutch farmer in New Freedom, Pennsylvania -- plain, common, ordinary people who lived in that area, now recognized as the Master's men, a company of people called to be saints.

When I stand here alone on occasion, I go to the altar, and when I find myself drawn to my knees in front of the wood carving, I think of the German refugee in Philadelphia in that second-story loft, who took his blocks of oak, and with skillful touch transformed these faces for us. I suppose if I could scan the panel very carefully I'd detect Germanic qualities in the faces of the Twelve, people he had known.

And do you think for a single minute that when I stand as a celebrant at the altar and take the Bread and the Cup and offer it to you, and you approach the altar -- constituting an extension of that Table in this place and in this day, that I don't look upon you, with all the traces of your limitation even as you look upon me with all the traces of my limitation, my faltering step... ...yet together we can be called saints. It's the halo that brings a transforming touch.

Would you like to bring a transforming touch to somebody's life? Look upon him, and keep looking, until you see something of the image of the eternal -- look for the halo. If you want to bring a transforming touch to this congregation, look upon every single member, and keep looking, until the halo emerges. And then perchance you might be surprised if someone looking at you sees what you can't see -- your halo.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Twenty-Fourth Sunday After Trinity November 16, 1969

"TO TOUCH OFF ROCKETS IN THEIR SOULS"
"(Luke 15:1)

If it please Thee, O God, let there be now some echo of Thy voice, no matter how faint, that we might hear. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

The name of the man: Bertrand Russell. What mental pictures you have at the sound of the man's name I'm not quite certain, but let me give you a gracious assist if necessary....pink-faced -- isn't that right? -- white-haired....one of the first of the past generation and this generation to fight the Establishment...a man 97 years of age, a Britisher who in three years will mark the centennial of his birth. He's written his autobiography.

In case you don't know, he's a man who has deliberately endeavored to live his life without reference to God, that is, the God in whom we believe, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Having reached the autumn of his life, and from his vantagepoint -- incidentally, a very able man, possessed by a very sharp, keen mind, what message does he have for the rest of us? Let me read for you several sentences from his autobiography:

" . . . We stand on the shore of an ocean, crying to the night and the emptiness; sometimes a voice answers out of the darkness. But it is the voice of one drowning; and in a moment the silence returns. The world seems to me quite dreadful; the unhappiness of many people is very great, and I often wonder how they all endure it. To know people well is to know their tragedy: it is usually the central thing about which their lives are built . . . "

Quite frankly, one doesn't have to be a Bertrand Russell to think or to speak like that. Nor does one have to wait until he's 97 years of age. Gen-

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erally speaking, most of us who have reached our majority, and if any kind of spiritual or emotional maturity has set in at all, we do admit that life is never without its tragic touch. This is a generalization, of course it is, but for most people, perhaps by the time they reach 30 they have either faced tragedy directly and personally or they've been related to those who have been dealt a tragic blow.

I am wondering if the historian could not establish a case that would read something like that at least once in every decade mankind somewhere, in civilization as we know it and experience it, has an effect of tragedy, even on a world-wide scale. If we are one world, then nothing that happens anywhere is ever without its effect -- everywhere. And like as not, the earthquake, the wind, the fire, the social upheaval - - man's restlessness, man haunted, daunted, discouraged.....life does deal its tragic blow.

And sometimes that tragedy comes to us because of our own folly and our own stupidity. But it's never enough to say to a man, "You have nobody to blame but yourself." There isn't much chance of improving a fellow when you point the finger of condemnation and you talk like that. Nor is it enough to say to a person, "Well, because we are inter-related and we're all part of one world, we're bound to suffer, to a degree at least, by anything that happens in an untoward way to somebody else"..and just accept the fact that that's the way the ball bounces, that's the way the cookie crumbles. Such a philosophy leads to fatalism, or if you stop and try to endure, stoicism.

If I were not a Christian I think I would be attracted to the Christian faith for a number of different reasons. One right now - - because somebody might have placed in my hands the Scriptures, and I would have read, with a

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fair degree of enthusiasm, the Gospel record of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. In my readings one day I would have come upon that 15th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. It's a trilogy, you know. Luke there has recorded for us three perfectly wonderful stories that God's-great-Galilean-turned-preacher had spoken on one occasion.....

> ...the first story is about a woman who lost a coin, and she just wouldn't give up, she kept looking and looking and looking and searching until she found the coin. She wouldn't admit that it was meant to be lost....she wouldn't accept the fact that she was meant to live without it....
>
> ...the second story is about a man who was a sheep-herder who had one hundred sheep. And one night when he brought them back to the cover that he offered them, he counted ninety-nine in the fold. But he just couldn't be content with having ninety-nine, he knew that he should have had one hundred. At the risk of his own life he went looking for what was lost, because he honestly believed that no single sheep of his was ever meant to be lost, and he wasn't going to mark it off that way.....so in the story that Jesus tells he kept looking for the sheep, this shepherd, until he found it. Then he came back with gladness of heart.....
>
> ....the third story in the trilogy deals with a man who

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had two boys. One of them decided to play the role of the reprobate. I can, in my mental imagery of the whole thing, picture Jesus telling the story.....there was the old man, bent by the years, his vision had become increasingly dim - - yet there was never a sunset but what the old gent wouldn't go out and scan as deeply as he could the horizon, to see if there could be any trace of the return of the rascal and the reckless one.. ...Jesus wanted the people who heard Him to understand that the boy was never meant to be forever consigned to hell, that somewhere, somehow, the principle of hope should never be lost fully.....

....well now, these are the three stories that you find recorded in the 15th chapter of Luke.

But I tell you about the three stories only because you have to note very carefully how they're introduced. The beginning verse of that 15th chapter reads like this, and the reference is to Jesus Christ:

> "Then drew near all the publicans and sinners, to hear him . . ."

Last summer when I was plotting this sermon schedule from September to June, and I anticipated the preaching of this sermon today, I was absolutely intrigued by the text, for these people, the publicans and the sinners - - they were the hurt and the defeated ones of their day - - they were completely discouraged. The candle of their life had begun to flicker, and the flame had begun to be very dim. They were the disadvantaged ones, politically, socially, economically - even religiously. So one day they met this wandering preacher.

He had something to say. What was His message?

For those of you who might be hurt today, for those of you who might be defeated, discouraged and despondent, I honestly believe that I would be attracted to the Christian faith if for no other reason than this: that in Jesus Christ it is possible to have a spring to one's step restored, and to have the joy of living re-established. Man was not meant to be defeated. And man was not meant for mediocrity. So Jesus Christ comes into the world -- to touch off rockets in men's souls -- to give them reason for living again, and to soar. This is part of the glory of the Christian message.

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They tell me that in the Far East, there are some people who when a man dies, rejoice.....and when a baby is brought into the world, wise men cry. Life for them is characterized by tragedy, one series after another, and theirs eventually becomes the philosophy of despair. Not so the Christian message. You know I'm giving my years, don't you, to just one thing -- whether it's made sense to you or not, this really is what it is: I'm telling you about Jesus Christ, that in Him and through Him there is hope for all mankind. Because of Jesus Christ it can be said -- you've heard me say it before -- while every saint has his past, there is a future for every sinner, and that future is to be characterized by hope.

Now what was this message that Jesus Christ had for these people that brought the redeeming, the redemptive touch? I think for one thing He gave them to understand that God is personally interested in them, that God cares. Now that's quite a thing to be able to say. It's even far greater to be able to believe it.

The most embarrassing moment that I think I have had in recent years was

when I was endeavoring to minister to a person whose need was very deep, the emotional scars of previous years were so evident.....and as he left my office he turned and said, "But the trouble between you and me is this: you happen to believe that God cares about you - - well I don't!" And I've chalked him down in the diary of my soul as one of the most pathetic people that I've ever met. And when I count my own blessings, I count myself to be numbered among those who are most fortunate because I do believe that there is a God who cares, and a God who is personally interested.

This is the kind of thing that Jesus Christ was trying to tell people. Some folks say He used extravagant gestures, extravagant figures of speech, when He said that not even a single sparrow falls to the ground but what God doesn't make note of it....and as far as an individual is concerned, God has numbered every single hair in a man's head. Which is only to say that God does take account of us, that God does pay attention to us.

But it's really not enough just to say that God cares. One must also also say that this continuing concern is made evident through the outstretched hand of Jesus Christ. If I understand the religions of the East aright, they allow themselves to exist primarily among a sophisticated group. If you're in the enlightened, you've made it! But there's no great passion or concern for somebody who hasn't made it.....

....or if perchance you've been victimized because of your own folly or your own stupidity, well you just pay the price - - sorry about that, old chap!

...but the Christian religion introduces the Saviour who operates through people who say, "I see what is happening - - can

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I give you a hand? Why don't we travel the high road together?"

I shudder when I think how many people there are in this world who have never known the high road because I've never extended my hand. That's the only way some people are ever going to know it! I shudder when I think how many people there are who have never known the joy of living because I've never much cared! I think the burden of burdens that rested upon my soul when I went to India some six years ago was that I would be there in that land and come into contact with certain people who would live and die without ever so much as ever be able to have a spring in their step and to say, "I know that my Redeemer lives." To know Jesus Christ is to live - - to live completely, to live boldly.

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They came out to hear Jesus Christ, because in His eyes there was the evidence of a radiant hope. Did I read some four decades ago, written by a man, it was titled, "The Lost Radiance of The Christian Religion" - - - isn't that a sad indictment! This is unfair, I know it is, but you be as patient with me as I'm going to be with my own evaluation of you. I sat in the back of the nave as the congregations gathered today. If I were to rest the Christian religion, set up its case, by the spring in <u>your</u> step, by the joy in <u>your</u> eyes, by the radiance of your soul.....I'm not going to finish the sentence. Maybe we didn't get enough sleep last night.

"I would not have my life be one of bliss,
Untouched by heartache, agony, despair - -
A pale, anemic thing. My nightly prayer
Is that with each new day I shall not miss
High venturings, nor undeserve the hiss
of envious human moles who never dare
<u>To touch off rockets in their souls</u>
<u>and flare</u>
Above their deepening grooves. O grant me this:

That I shall scale life's peaks, explore its glooms,
Know mountained ecstasies, deep-valleyed pains - -
That when my last red sands by Time are sieved
And life has struck my sinews from her looms,
I shall have earned three words o'er my remains:
Beside "was born" and "died"
"between he lived"!

.....and that's what the Christian religion is all about, that we might live - -

- - not somehow, but triumphantly! - - now.

(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Last Sunday After Trinity November 23, 1969

"READY? FOR WHAT?"
(Matthew 25:1-13)

Make us silent before Thee, O God, that even now this voice, no matter how faulty, feeble nor frail, it may still be discerned as some echo of the Eternal Voice. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

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The tendency to draw sharply dividing lines is a very persistent one. Wittingly or unwittingly we go about it day by day. It may be done with a prejudiced eye, it may be done coldly, analytically, quite objectively. It might even be done by the pressures of life themselves that come to play upon us. The tendency to draw sharply dividing lines is a persistent one.

Very quickly I could rattle off a few for you right now....

rich	:	poor
conservative	:	liberal
black	:	white
good	:	bad
saved	:	unsaved
prepared	:	unready

And all this leads me to today's sermon, which is based, significantly enough and very properly, upon the Gospel Lesson for this day, which happens to be the last Sunday of the church year - - thirteen verses of the 25th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew.

You may recall how Charles read those verses for us. They constitute a story that was told by Jesus Christ, and a story in the telling of which Jesus

Christ, by deliberate design, draws His sharp line of demarcation. In His story He talks about ten people, ten people who had a particular assignment. They were to go out to meet and to greet the bridegroom. And then in the telling of the story Jesus Christ draws a line and divides those people into two sections, 50 - 50.....

> ...the percentage is quite irrelevant - - the line could have been drawn with 70 - 30; 60 - 40; 80 - 20.....that isn't the important thing.....

...the important thing was that He was able to divide them, and to divide them into two groups, for which the classification, as long as men can read the Scriptures, will remain:

the prepared ones : the unprepared ones

The story commands attention, not just because Jesus Christ told it, but over and above that, because He told it for the reason that He told it. When you look at this story you'll notice first off that He was talking about something that was yet to happen. It's a story that deals with a future event. As He gathered His disciples around Him and told this story, He told them about a wedding that was scheduled. Word had gone out about it and people were to look forward to its taking place. He told this story because at this particular time of His life He was trying to get the disciples to focus their attention upon a future event. Now let's make much of this -- Jesus Christ had His eye on the future.

Part of the problem that many of us have today is that we've never quite learned how to balance this whole business of past, present and future. We've

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never gotten things in their right perspective. We have a way of fragmenting, if you please, Eternity, and I'm not so certain that Eternity was meant to be fragmented. Sunday by Sunday when you and I come to worship in this place, we cast our eye on the eternal dimension, which is Everlasting Life, and in doing that we're always caught up with something that's already happened, and we're caught up with the demands of the present moment, and we think of the "blessed hope" - to use a figure of speech.

When I talk to you about Jesus Christ --

-- and talk about Him I must, and talk about Him I will, and when I no longer talk about Him I no longer have a right to be heard.....

....how did Jesus Christ handle this whole business of past, present and future?

Let it be said at once that He had a high regard for the past. He never allowed Himself to completely ignore it. He talked about it with reverence and affection. He knew the prophets, He knew their day. And when He came into our world, He stood solidly and firmly upon the shoulders of all that was good and noble in the past. The link was there.

But it must also be recognized that He never allowed Himself to be imprisoned by the past, nor in the past. And this is the risk that some of us take -- ah, yes, it can set in at forty-five....fifty....most certainly by fifty-five.....when one looks back and enjoys a peculiar measure of delight in looking back -- they were the good old days.....

....and if you came out of a setting that was quite pastoral, surely we much prefer it to our urbanized culture, surely we talk about the time when life was far less complicated than now. Because time and distance have a way

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of bringing an aura to the past, we honestly believe that in those days the virtues were espoused, and men and women did order the days of their years by living within a moral frame of reference, which we say we are not quite certain is true today. Jesus Christ looked back upon the past. It was a definite part of His life. You and I have to be very careful how we look back to the past, lest we become victimized and become imprisoned by it.

Jesus Christ knew how to handle the present. I'm not so sure that some of us do. This leads to our frustration and our anxiety. We're much more secure when we think of the past, and even fairly comfortable when we think of the future because its demands are not yet placed upon us. But the present? More than one person cries out in anguish, "If only I could get through today!" How does one handle the present?

Well, here was Jesus Christ. He began His ministry in His day by standing up and saying to a group of people, "First I want to talk to you about something out of the past." And then He quoted a prophet - - and the amazing thing, that He who was the champion of the Now Generation in His day, said good things about the past, and said, "This thing that comes out of the past is so good that I want it to lay hold upon me today".....and He said, "Today this scripture is going to be fulfilled."

Oh, I don't say it with tongue-in-cheek, but those who are under thirty in our day are classified as the Now Generation. They think only of the present moment and the demands of the present moment and living today, and today alone. I suppose you have to live a while until you learn to appreciate the past. You won't argue with that, will you? But Jesus Christ so handled the present that He said it has to be built upon the past, and you can't divorce

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it from the past. And all the while He was doing it, He kept His eye on the future. It took a bit of doing, but He was able to do it. He succeeded so well that when He was gone, the disciples who constituted the early church kept talking about living their life in the light of a blessed event that was yet to come.

Now, in the story that serves as the Gospel Lesson for today, we're reminded that Jesus Christ dealt with the future, and in a very proper perspective. He knew it was going to come. Tomorrow does come. And there are some people who have lived long enough to know that life has meaning only as the tomorrows are unfolded, and they anticipate it. So therefore when people think of tomorrow, most people make some kind of preparation for it.

But that's not the point. The point is, what kind of a tomorrow do you anticipate? Because our preparation is made according to the kind of tomorrow that we look forward to. There are some people who are so embittered by today, and so disappointed by the past, that they have no joy in their hearts when they think about tomorrow. Their only dread is that it could be more of the same. God only knows, that's the last thing that they want in tomorrow.

When you talk about the future, as a Christian you're in duty bound to think of the future in terms of something that's held in God's hand, and since it's held in God's hand, then it's got to be <u>good.</u> And if we understand the nature and the character of God aright, God <u>is</u> good, and whatever God gives us, then, is going to be good. And when we do get something from God's hand and we call it good, it leads to something better, and the better always leads to the best.....which enables a man to say, "The best is yet to be!" It might take a great deal of courage to believe it, it might even take more

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courage to live by it. But if God has anything to do with the future at all, you can't gainsay this thought. Oh, I'm not forgetting that this is a moral universe. And God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ also made known to His people that the sins of the fathers will be visited upon the children, and it goes on from one generation to another, and that justice will not be short-changed, or short-circuited -- this I most certainly believe.....

.....but He's not simply a God of wrath, He's not simply a God of justice. The God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a God of love and of truth. So, therefore, when you anticipate the future, anticipate it, in His hand some good thing. For in the future God always remains, to put it blandly, a formidable figure!

What matters most, then, is the kind of tomorrow for which one prepares. Some folks think only in terms of its physical demands, so they build up their material and their financial resources accordingly - - and well they might! Others anticipate a day that will also have its requirements of patience, love and trust, and subsequently they give priority to things of the spirit. And I think that's what Jesus Christ was trying to make plain in this parable ---- that in the future God's goodness would be made known as never before, if one may put it that way.

Now anybody who has lived in the Orient, anybody who has lived in the Middle East knows that the time of a wedding is the happiest time in all their lives. It's a time of merriment, of singing and dancing. It was a time when the only decent and satisfying meal that some people ever got was when they were invited to the banquet table of a joyous wedding occasion. So Jesus Christ talks about the future, and He likens it to a wedding, a happy event.

Those who drew the full benefit from it weret the ones on the other side of

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the line who were categorized as having been made ready for it. I want to conclude this sermon with a very simple illustration. It comes out of a novel that was written maybe 30 - 35 years ago -- I've forgotten the name of the novel, I've forgotten the name of the author. But I remember something of the character that's portrayed in the novel.....

> ....he was quite a chap, who in the days of his youth was a philanderer. He lived recklessly, he lived lustily. Then one day his tomorrow came, and would you believe me, that in his tomorrow there was a perfectly lovely woman, pure and chaste. They fell in love. They got married. ...but by the author's admission in the novel, the chap who had lived recklessly and lustily was never able to fully appreciate her beauty and her grace and her truth, for in the years that he spent with her there was always some kind of a blot in his mind by which he besmirched her goodness and her loveliness....

The future can have that kind of thing in store for <u>any</u> man. It could happen to you, it does happen. But when all that is good, and beautiful, is laid in front of us, the only man who is really able to appreciate it is the person who has made ready for that sort of thing in advance.

And I think that's one reason why in the Church's calendar we have the Advent season - - when the moment of moments arrives, and the line of demarcation is drawn, we might be where we ought to be. In a world that's still complicated, there are still some very simple things by which the truth-of-truths can be said:

<u>We're either ready</u> : <u>or we're not.</u>

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The First Sunday in Advent — November 30, 1969

"THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRISTMAS:
I -- TO WHOM?" (Luke 2:10-11)

LAY HOLD upon us, O God, that we may hear, with our hearing there may come understanding, and with understanding there may come commitment. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

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When Ralph Taylor came to the meeting of the New Members Group last Monday night, he presented to those who were present copies of Luther's Catechism in a contemporary translation. He represented the Sorrick Bible Group, that's been doing this sort of thing for some time now. In the few minutes allotted to Ralph to make the presentation, he just couldn't quite cut himself free from his own day's work. He works at NASA, and he had brought along with him some photographs, the authentic ones, of man landing on the moon. And we could clearly see, as the photographs were passed around, the foot-prints left by our man on the moon - - and also his outstretched hand by which he unfurled the flag, since there is no breeze to accomplish it in that way.

When man first landed on the moon, he was returning a compliment-of-sorts, don't you think? For didn't he say that he went there in the name of peace for all mankind? - - reminiscent of that first invasion, the God-Man's invasion of earth. And when that took place some two thousand years ago, wasn't there something said then about peace? Now, two thousand years later, man returns the compliment-of-sorts.

But quite frankly, that's about the only point at which there's any similarity - - the fact that the note of peace should be struck, whether it be heaven-to-earth or earth-to-heaven. All else is contrast.

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Oh, to a degree I suppose one would have to admit that there were many people at hand when the God-Man's invasion took place, just as there were many people at hand watching the event when our men went to the moon. What they did they did with the whole world, if you please, looking on. While having said that, one must also admit that while there were many people in Jerusalem, and even Bethlehem was crowded to capacity, so much so that there wasn't even room left for a pregnant woman about to give birth to a child -- no one making fit to offer her accommodation, so great was the press and the impersonal nature of their coming together.....while it is true that there's nobody on the moon, so we're led to believe, to trace those footprints -- while there's nobody on the moon now to see the flag -- it almost happened that way when the God-Man's invasion on earth took place. While we had many people here, yet to all intents and purposes the event took place almost unnoticed. Even the two people most directly involved, a peasant girl and a carpenter's son -- they were somewhat bewildered by the event. And the man in whose very back yard the event took place took no note of it whatsoever.

It wasn't as though God had decreed a news blackout, it wasn't as though He didn't want the word to get around. The truth of the matter is, for two thousand years, and maybe before that, He had released some kind of advance copy, an intimation of this thing that was yet to come, and there were people who were invited or uninvited guests at certain gatherings who made it a point to make the most of any occasion that might come their way to talk about it. We refer to them, of course, as the prophets and the seers, the men to whom God gave specific revelation. They did talk about this thing that was yet to come. It wasn't as though God had not given out advance copy - - it wasn't as though God had decreed a news blackout. He did encourage people to talk about

it. But the fact remains that when the Event-of-Events took place, very few had any idea whatsoever of what was going on.

This is the first in the series of sermons during Advent, dealing with "The Good News of Christmas." For our purpose today we raise the question: To whom? did the good news come first?

Laying aside now, briefly, the fact that Mary knew about it, and Joseph knew about it, and certain wise men were told, were given some intimation of what was taking place.....there were two men, so we are led to believe, shepherds, who were watching their flock by night....

> ...you're caught up with it now, aren't you? - that mystical air about the announcement? ....shepherds? ...the blackness of the night broken only by the silvery stars from above - - they knew about it. They were the first to get the word.

What's to be said about it?

Well, for one thing, they didn't chalk up much of a record for attendance at the synagogue; they weren't very learned as far as books were concerned; they never worried much about their bank balances; they served on no committees. Yet they were the ones who first got the'special word'about the God-Man's invasion of earth -- the Heaven-to-Earth mission, that is. Honestly now, why them? What do you make of it?

You would suppose, wouldn't you, that if God had this special announcement to make, He would have gone directly to the priests, to whatever prophets-of-sorts were still hanging around, to scribes and Pharisees, to people caught up in the doing of holy things. But to the contrary, He went outside the synagogue...

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....He went outside an ecclesiastical gathering...

...didn't even bother so much as to take a second look at a tribune....

...passed over immediately the king's palace...

...never for a moment gave thought to the Emperor.....

...but rather, He went to a hillock, where two men were tending their sheep.

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It's a rather frightening thing to admit that this is true. I spend a great deal of my time encouraging you to come to church. A certain amount of my energy is being spent in encouraging you to read the Scriptures, and devotional books. A certain amount of my time is spent talking with the Parish Administrator and suggesting names for committees, so that there is greater involvement (which is that great word for today). Now I stand before you on this First Sunday in Advent and I sing the praise of men who just weren't caught up in any of these things. Am I mistaken? -- on either score? -- to encourage you to become more involved, or to sing the praise of men who just weren't given to religious activity - - - ?

Well, let's attempt the answer, the answer to the question: Why them? Why were they the ones to whom the good news first came? - as it did not come to any others.

Do you suppose it could be because they were men primarily of meditation and reflective thought? - - just because they weren't caught up in anything else except their days' work, they had plenty of time, inthe silences of the night, to think, and to think deeply upon the things that matter most...

...an indictment upon our civilization is that we just don't know how to think. But what is more, we don't know how to use silence.

> ...I wager to say, if I could have been daring enough in this service today to have planned even five minutes in which you would hear no organ music, in which no person would speak, in which all of us would remain absolutely speechless and quiet - - stark silence for five minutes.....we'd hardly know what to do with it. Any number of people would become completely baffled -- not by the noise, the din and the clamor and confusion of life, but by the silence, when perchance it ever comes.....

These men by nature of their day's work were schooled in being able to handle time for reflection and meditation.

I would submit to you that they were not strangers to God's truth, and even though they were not in the synagogue faithfully because of the obligation which they had to their sheep, they were not completely ignorant of the Scriptures. God does have His way of coming to those who are made silent before Him. I would cherish for every one of you, even as I covet it for myself, increasing opportunities for reflective thought, in the silences that we deliberately allow ourselves.

The second thing that could be said is that the good news came to them because they were men of integrity and they were faithfully discharging an obligation that was placed upon them. They found themselves all caught up in their day's work. They only knew one thing - - they had a job to do, and they were going to see that that job was done. While sometimes shepherds were fairly ostracized from society, yet on the other hand we're led to believe that they were men highly regarded. The Old Testament holds up in front of us the glorious figure of the shepherd, and our favorite passage of Scripture in the Old Testament is Psalm 23.

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And to those who cherish what is found in the pages of the New Testament, they'll tarry long and earnestly at the 10th chapter of John, in which Jesus Christ likens Himself to the Good Shepherd. To some of us there is no figure of speech that speaks more to the human condition than the concept of God's shepherding love. Well, these were shepherds, and they went about their day's work with fidelity. They knew only one thing, to do the job at hand.

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Let it be clearly understood that I'm not about to give up encouraging you to come to God's House. I'm not about to give up encouraging you to read devotional material. And if I had my way, we'd shift our committees every single year, so that in the course of five years perhaps, or ten years at the most, every single member of this congregation became directly involved in one particular thrust or another. I haven't changed my mind one bit in this regard.

But to the contrary, let it also be said, and if you think it's pleasing to God only because you've come here, if you think it's pleasing to God only because you do serve on a committee, if you think it's pleasing to God only because you do pass resolutions and talk back and forth to one another, as sometimes we're wont to do.....no matter how nobly intentioned we may be, this just is not enough. The only reason we've come here is that we might better find God somewhere else.....

....did it ever occur to you that it might be in the silences of reflective thought? ....that it might be in your performance of a day's work with honesty and integrity? So the good news of Christmas came first to men, if you please, who weren't saying their prayers, who weren't conducting a church service -- they were on the periphery of things, doing an honest day's work.

Roland Bainton, bless his soul, one time went through all of Luther's sermons that touch upon the Advent theme, and then he took snatches of those sermons and compiled them in the Martin Luther Christmas Book, an excellent little thing. He talks about the Visitation, he talks about the Annunciation, he talks about the shepherds, he talks about the wise men.....

....when he talks about the shepherds, he talks about the last thing that the Evangelist says about them, that "they returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen as it was told unto them"

...but "they returned"

...and this is what Luther says by way of reflection upon this text: "Why, this is wrong. We should correct the passage to read: 'They' (meaning the shepherds) 'went and shaved their heads, fasted, told their rosaries, and put on cowls. Why, instead we read 'The shepherds returned'. Where to? To their sheep! Oh, that can't be right," says Luther, "Did they not leave everything and follow Christ? Must not one forsake father and mother, wife and child, to be saved? But the Scriptures say plainly that they returned and did exactly the same work as before. And they did not despise their service, but took it up again, just where they left off."

.....and maybe, who knows, this, too, could be part of the Good News of Christmas.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Prayer - Pastor David Shaheen
The First Sunday in Advent - November 30, 1969

O GOD, our Father, we thank You that You sent Your Son Jesus Christ into this world to be our Savior. We thank You that He took our body upon Himself, and so showed us that this body of ours is fit to be Your dwelling place.

We thank You that he did our work, that He earned a living, that He served the public, and so showed us that even the smallest task is not beneath Your majesty and can be done for You.

We thank You, O God, that He lived in an ordinary home, that He knew the problems of living together, and that He experienced the rough and smooth of family life, and so showed us that any home, however humble, can be a place where in the ordinary routine of daily living we can make all living an act of worship to you.

LORD JESUS, come again to us this day, come into our hearts and so cleanse them that we, being pure in heart, may see God our Father.

Come into our minds, and so enlighten them that we may know you are the way, the truth and the Light.

Touch our lips, that we may speak no word which would hurt another.

Touch our eyes, that we may never linger on anything forbidding.

Touch our hands, that they may become instruments of service to the needs of others.

O GOD, come when we are sad, to comfort us; when we are tired, to refresh us; when we are lonely, to cheer us. Come when we are tempted, to strengthen us; when we are perplexed, to guide us; when we are happy, to make our joy doubly dear.

O GOD, our Father, help us so to live that whenever Your call comes for us, it may find us ready, our work completed, and our hearts at peace with you.

OUR FATHER.....

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Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Second Sunday in Advent December 7, 1969

"THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRISTMAS:
II - WHEN?" (Luke 2:10-11)

ENABLE US to believe, O God, that no matter how faint nor how faulty it may be, it could still be discerned as an echo of Your voice, in this day and in this place. Therefore, speak now to us, cleanse us by Thy Holy Spirit, that we shall be made receptive. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son our Lord. Amen.

There are some people who are the type who forever deal with specifics. They go around with the proverbial notebook and pencil, jotting down - -

"Now, when did you say?" - - -

"What time is it to be?" - - -

"Where will it take place?" - - -

There is much to be said for people who deal specifically with the details of life, and all of its possibilities.

Take my friend of blessed memory. You would have liked her very much, and she was the kind of a woman, you see, who if you said to her, "Now, we've been wanting to have you over for dinner - - you must come sometime"....and she'd immediately reply - - "When?" Life does have meaning only as we look upon it specifically.

I have been going at a slow pace these weeks in my own private devotional reading. I began with the first verse of Genesis, I'm up, now, to almost the end of the Second Book of Chronicles. I continue to be amazed how specifically God dealt with the Children of Israel - - - how often He talked about certain events, certain places, certain things, certain people, and things that had been done in a certain way at a certain time. As you turn the pages of the

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Good Book you'll discover for yourself how specific God could be with them. Will you recognize such phrases as these:

"- - in this day - - " "This night thy soul shall be required of thee - - "

" - - in the year - - " "- - certain shepherds -- "

" - - a certain man - - "

Now as to the text, which serves as the basis for this sermon on the second Sunday in Advent. You will find it recorded in the second chapter of the Gospel according to Luke. It's the announcement that came to certain men. Notice how specifically it's put:

" - - for unto you - - "

...well, let's underline that word you - - not just anybody in particular, but to a certain group of men gathered at a certain place, who felt the divine finger pointing to them - - - "This message applies to you - - "

...how specific can one get?

" - - for unto you is born this day - - "

...you underline this, of course. The angelic announcement was, I'm talking about something that's happening now - - not about something that took place, not some vague reference to something that's about to take place in the future - - - but this day.

...how specific can you get?

" - - for unto you is born this day in the city of David"(which is Bethlehem)

...not up the road ten, fifteen, twenty miles, not just travel on and maybe you'll come to it. But the sign-post is specific: " - - for

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unto you is born this day in the city of David - - "

" - - a Saviour - - "

....not just another prophet, not just another teacher, not just another king, not just another good man, a moralist, a philosopher....

" - - a Saviour - - "

...how specific can you get?

Now that we're in the midst of the Advent season, let me remind you, as you anticipate Christmas, that Christmas is God's supreme specific, so much so that looking back upon the Event-of-Events, that man with supreme spiritual discernment, the Apostle Paul, could say that " - in him " (this Man) " - - all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell." God deals in specifics.

This text-of-texts: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour - - "

...the time, the place, the person, the purpose! - - all spelled out specifically. So the announcement made it specific. It was that very night when the Event-of-Events took place. The Hebrew-Christian tradition makes much of the fact that God does have a schedule. Now, what's to be said for this sort-of-thing when the eternal breaks through so precisely? What concern ought we to have in regard to God's specifics?

Let me be as practical, hopefully as helpful, as possible.

Notice how specific God is in regard to one day in the week. "Remember --" ...and then He talked about one day in particular. And He indicated for us what ought to be the nature and the character of that day. And then it spilled over into the New Testament - - one day out of seven was to have a particular quality

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and characteristic that the other days did not have. He was very specific at that point.

But we've come along with our latitude, our liberty, our sophistication, with a fair degree of learning, and we've said that all days are alike. We've deliberately tried to blot out the distance between the secular and the sacred. Oh, very properly we can say that every day is important to God, but in God's wisdom, dealing with the Children of Israel and all who would come after them, He did say, "There is one day that's to have a nature and a character not quite like the other days." He did specify.

Now you know why He did, don't you? - - that we should so observe this one day, so that all the other days, then, might have their halo, and they get their halo only as we properly observe the one day. We've gone quite afar afield in forgetting how specific God has been, with His One-Day-out-of-seven - - His One-Day-in-seven.

The atheist Rousseau honestly believed that he could destroy the Christian religion as soon as we would ignore God's command concerning the Sabbath or the Lord's Day. Small wonder, then, that God should be so specific in regard to One-Day-in-seven.

Notice how God has specified: "Where two or three are gathered together, I'll be there" - - - that's quite specific. Yet, with our latitude and our sophistication we've permitted ourselves to believe that a man can find God anywhere. We say it quite boldly and bluntly - - a man doesn't have to go to church to be religious.

Well, maybe he doesn't. And there's a great deal to be said for the fact that a man can find God anywhere. But in God's wisdom, He spelled it out quite

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specifically, in which He said:

"Where two or three are gathered together - - that's
where I can be found - - "

...and so this is where we find Him. And when we do find Him somewhere else it's only because we've better found Him here. This I most certainly believe. And perchance one day we'll recognize the wisdom of God in specifying the necessity for those of us to come together, to be made aware of what God can do for us in a corporate setting.

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The Church properly understands the Sacrament, specifically the Lord's Supper, when we permit ourselves to believe that God comes to us in the Sacrament as He does not come at any other time or in any other way. And when Jesus Christ instituted the Sacrament, He was quite specific. He gave us no alternative - - - "Do it - - - -"when He said: " - observe it - - receive it."

When I turn the pages of the Old Testament again, I notice, and very uncomfortably so, how when God laid down the law, how specific He was:

"Do this - - " "Don't do that - - "

...He provides no options, no alternatives.

But again I say, we with our sophistication, we with our much learning, have come along and have allowed ourselves a fair measure of gray zones in which to operate. When God laid down the law, He was terribly specific.

I've lived long enough among some of you to know that when we set up a meeting, we always have to sait until you can check your calendars. I never cease to marvel at how many people here in this parish have appointment books, and not necessarily professional people at that, in which they keep a schedule of what lies ahead. Why does one keep his appointment book? Why does one

keep his schedule? Because he knows that at certain times and certain places certain things are going to occur, and if one isn't there when it happens, he'll be denied what took place there. God's the great Appointment-Maker, God's the great Scheduler. He has set up certain things to take place at certain times. I plead with you to become the kind of person who becomes sensitive to the fact that God operates according to a schedule. There are certain things that He does at an appointed time. If you and I are not there, we're denied what He's scheduled for us.....

> ...suppose the shepherds would have said to themselves, "Oh, the reference isn't being made to us. That finger of God is pointing over our shoulder to somebody else."
>
> ...but they allowed it to be a very specific thing, and they applied the truth to themselves.....
>
> ...suppose the shepherds would have said, "Even though the announcement said this day, well going to Bethlehem on one day, it's just as good as another day -- what difference does it make?"
>
> ...but the text responds with these words, "And then the shepherds said one to another, Let us <u>now</u> go unto Bethlehem, Let us <u>now</u> see the thing that's come to pass.".....

...and it was only as they girded themselves and went, took to the road immediately, to keep the appointment, to keep the rendezvous with God, that they were there when the Event-of-Events took place.

So as your Pastor, your shepherd, the Bishop of your souls, I plead with you - - God does operate according to a schedule. Discipline yourself to be on hand when certain things take place, in certain places.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

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Prayer - The Rev. David R. Shaheen
The Second Sunday in Advent - December 7, 1969

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O GOD, Our Heavenly Father, Your care for us neither slumbers nor sleeps, and Your grace is sufficient for all things. We ask your help for all the chances and changes of this life.

HELP US to meet with courage and with strength anything that life can bring to us . . .

When some special effort is demanded from us: Give us strength to do what we never thought we could do.

When some powerful temptation assails us: Help us to resist it and to do the right.

When some decision has to be made: Give us the guidance and make us humble enough to take it.

When doubts attack us: Help us to find the way to certainty again.

When we feel like despairing, either about ourselves or the world: Help us to remember that you are God, and that in the end Your victory is sure.

When we are weighted down by our responsibilities and daunted by our tasks: Help us to remember that we can do nothing alone.

When we are afraid of the unknown future: Help us to remember that nothing in life, nor in death, in time or in eternity, can separate us from Your love in Jesus Christ our Lord.

When it is difficult and dangerous to do the right thing: Help us to obey Your will and Your command, no matter what the consequences may be.

When we have to endure pain: Help us to endure it with courage and with faithfulness and without complaint.

When we have to bear sorrow: Help us not to sorrow as those who have no hope, but rather even then to have the joy of those for whom Jesus Christ is the Resurrection and the Life.

When we have to face disappointment, hatred, ill-will, slander and misunderstanding: Help us to remember that we do no more than walk the way our Master walked.

O GOD, so grant, that nothing may break our strength, or darken our hope, or sway us from our loyalty right to the very end.....OUR FATHER.....

Sermon - Pastor Shaheen
The Third Sunday in Advent — December 14, 1969

"THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRISTMAS:
III - WHERE?" (Luke 2:10-11)

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father, and
from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

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Make no mistake about it, I say it reverently, she was a teenage peasant girl, he was a carpenter's lad. They were greatly surprised at the prospect of their having a baby. In fact, most anyone, no matter how remotely associated with that Baby, was surprised . . .

. . . as an example, to be added to the list - -

- - the inn-keeper. Suppose one day the revelation had come to him that that Baby was born in his backyard. How surprised he would have been . . .

- - and the one who took it as a real shocker was a king by the name of Herod, who could hardly believe the news. Yet he acted as though it were factual, and as a result issued an order that treated the whole matter very drastically in his attempt to nullify it . . .

- - the shepherds, the wise men - - they, too, were surprised, when having received the divine directive, they took to the road and at journey's end found nothing except a teenage mother, a carpenter's lad, and a baby.

If you and I were charged with the responsibility of reproducing this dramatically, I could well understand how any of you with director's blood coursing

through his veins, would somehow arrange to have, at the precise moment when the wise men and the shepherds looked into the eyes of the Baby, to have a chorus of voices offstage either shout, chant or sing: "Surprise! Surprise!" For when it's all said and done, Advent brings to our attention that Christmas is the greatest of all of God's surprises. For surely no one ever imagined that God would come to earth exactly in that way and in that place and through those people.

But God deals with us surprisingly. That seems to be His nature. And some of us resent it. We'd much rather be able to predict the things that are to come - - predict them according to our pattern, according to our style, according to our desire. We'd like to have things work out exactly the way we'd like to have them work out. That was part of the trouble with ancient Judea as far as Jesus was concerned - - He surprised them by being the kind of Messiah that He was. They would have chosen Him to be an entirely different kind of person, and to have done things in an entirely different way. God is the Great Surpriser.

And we have reason to believe, even as Scripture dictates to us, that when our last hour may come, it may well come as a surprise. And it behooves every single one of us who runs his course through the years to so order our days of our life that we might be ready for the surprise announcement that could come to us.

When the wise men and the shepherds followed the directive they came to Bethlehem; David's Town, that is. 'Twasn't very big. Never was. But that's where the world-changing force was focused that night. Might just as well

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have been any other hundred houses or so and a tiny street. Perhaps yes. Yet, maybe no. It wasn't only that it was a small town; it was David's Town. And what could that mean? For one thing, God doesn't despise the little and the seemingly insignificant. For another thing, God does work with some link in the past - - David's Town, that is.

Now having said all this as quickly as I possibly can, how can I be as direct as far as we are concerned? -- to further develop the theme that God comes to us in the unexpected, if you please, or if you will, in the seemingly insignificant - - in what we might pass by and never so much as notice. What can I make of it for us?

I have been among you long enough to be able to gather, immediately, enough sermonic material to hold me in good stead for month after month of sermons. Let me illustrate quickly, with just one or two at hand . . . from within our own life, from within our own congregation . . .

> ...there is a little lady. Some of you have made her acquaintance. But if you had not made the acquaintance in some prior manner, she could be here, you could pass right by her and never so much as give her a second look. She gets up on a Sunday morning at 5:30. She takes a cab - - not about to rely upon a public conveyance, in order to be here. She gives her concern for certain details that have to be reckoned with before any of the rest of you come. She has a kind of obsession about having things ready in God's House....then she wants to be here in order to be part of the little group that meets in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart - - a handful pf people who offer intercession...
>
> ...if God is possessing your soul with a measure of peace

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right now, it could be that at 7:30 this morning she and a handful of others were there, asking that this very thing would happen...

...you'd pass her by, I say -- seemingly insignificant. You'd never expect God to be at work. Yet the birth of Jesus Christ is being made effective in her life . . .

...I'd be willing to wager, if I were a gambler, that 99 44/100% of you could not call him by name or recognize him. He was here this morning at 8:30. He is a "born-again" Christian. He has quite a past. But his future is exceedingly wonderful, and his present is exciting and stimulating. When the congregation purchased the property at 1006 Dale Drive, we got a number of headaches with it. Not the least was an accumulation of underbrush in the back yard. When the house was being made ready for occupancy, there was additional debris being collected. It remained an unsightly mess for weeks and for months. This chap, together with a number of other volunteers who stretched forth their hands to help out - - but I single him out particularly because he did not do it by himself....but he went down into the District of Columbia, and he hand-picked some 'winos' - - some fellows who go from one cheap bottle of wine to another....and he honestly believed that at least for that day in the week their life ought to have some kind of meaning, and they ought to give themselves productively to some enterprise....and he gathered them together and put them to work . . . not just because a back yard had to be cleaned up. I sing his praise because as a member of this congregation he's allowing the birth of Jesus Christ to become effective through him in

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the life of other folks.....seemingly insignificant. Other folks would pass them by.....

...I'm not quite certain whether she's here at this hour or not. She has a way of laying it on the line with people. She belongs to Alcoholics Anonymous. You could pass her by - - hardly so much notice that she was alongside of you. Yet I have reason to believe, and you ought to hear me say it, that she's done as much good for some people as ten preachers could do in a lifetime.....because she's allowing herself to become a channel of God's grace and God's truth, allowing her soul to become a kind of Bethlehem, that another person's soul might also be made ready for the indwelling of Jesus Christ...

...God at work - - the Good News coming to us in the unexpected, in the seemingly insignificant.

...You would not have heard it, of course you wouldn't have heard it -- it took place the other Sunday morning. There were just two of us in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart between services. This was the way the conversation went: "Pastor, you didn't see much of me last year - - " ...he's a college student.....this year he came forward, with Jesus Christ being born anew in his heart, and he's teaching a Sunday School class...

...unheralded, no trumpets before them - - in the seemingly insignificant, in the seemingly unexpected, God is at work!

Surprisingly so? If it were not for the fact that as far as God's concerned, there is always the link with the past. I suppose I could relate for you, in relationship with each of these that I've already mentioned, some prior

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person who has been at work in their lives. You've heard me tell you occasionally about Augustine, one of the greatest of all the early church fathers. He was a rascal, a reprobate, but he was converted to Jesus Christ. In that moment of conversion I suppose there were those who said, "God in one swell stroke has worked a miracle -- surprisingly so! - - who'd ever have thought this of him?" ...but there were links with the past. Somewhere, weeks, months, even years before the miracle took place, there was a man who looked upon Augustine as a person, who looked upon him as the man he could one day become. There was a woman named Monica, his mother, who never gave up praying that one day her son might be converted anew to Jesus Christ - - these are links in the past. God does not act in any unrelated manner.

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There's always the link in the past. David's Town, that is. Bethlehem represents the yearning of the Hebrew people - - all through the centuries this hunger and thirst that one day their saviour would come. God does not ignore the pleading of the centuries, God does not ignore all that has gone on before. He does not act unrelatedly. There is always some link in the past. You want a surprise for yourself? Surprise yourself by believing that God is using you now as a link in relationship to some exceedingly wonderful thing that's going to take place a few years from now.

In the parish that I was privileged to serve before I came to you, we had a grand old soul - - we called him the "Grand Old Man of Messiah's." God allowed him to live until he was almost 96 - 97 years of age - - a perfectly wonderful man. And to this very day I have a photograph of him on my desk. One day I said to his daughter, "How do you account for the fact that your father happens to be as fine a man as he is?" She surprised me with her answer by saying, "Well, Granddaddy, he was quite a chap, too!" There's a link, somewhere, that God's able to latch on to when He seemingly surprises us with something wonderful. * * * (this sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer - Pastor David Shaheen
Advent III - December 14, 1969

O GOD, our Father:
You have said that You love humility, and that You hate pride.
Help us to have that humility which pleases You, save us from
the pride which separates us from You . . .
.....humility to realize our own ignorance . . .
.....humility to know how much we do not know . . .
.....humility to compare our drop of knowledge with the great
ocean of truth all undiscovered before us . . .

Grant us this, O God:
...humility to forget our own importance . .
...humility never to think of our own place, our rights,
our prestige . . .
...humility to accept injuries and insults without
resentment and without bitterness, and still to
forgive . .
Grant us this, O God.

Grant us the humility which recognizes its own weakness, and its
own unworthiness . .
...the humility which thinks less of what it has done
and what it has failed to do, the humility which
keeps itself humble by comparing its life with
the life of Jesus, and by setting its own sin
in the light of Your holiness.

O God, grant us the humility which recognizes its own failures . .
...the humility which sorrowfully sees that it has broken
Your commands and broken Your heart . .
...the humility which can only say, God be merciful
to me, a sinner.

Save us, O God, and deliver us from all pride - -
- - from the intellectual pride which despises simple
people . .
- - from the social pride which looks down on those
whose place in society is, as it thinks, inferior
to its own . .
- - from the pride in achievement which leads to self-
importance and self-conceit . . .
- - from the spiritual pride which makes us think ourselves
better than others . .
Save us and keep us, O God.

O God, Our Father, help us all of our days to walk humbly before our
fellow-men, in honor preferring one another, in love bearing
with one another, in mercy forgiving one another, and to
walk reverently before You, ever remembering the power which
created us, the sin which stains us, the grace which sought
us, and the love which has redeemed.

OUR FATHER . . . .

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Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Fourth Sunday in Advent — December 21, 1969

"THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRISTMAS:
IV - WHAT?" (Luke 2:10-11)

Keep coming, O God, keep coming. Maybe one day we'll stay still long enough to hear, perhaps right now. Amen.

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The well-known and widely celebrated British magazine known as PUNCH a few years ago carried a very interesting cartoon. It was the cartoonist's desire to satirize the commercialization and the secularization of Christmas. It was very cleverly done, and the character who was portrayed in the cartoon is supposed to have said, "I surely don't know what we're coming to these days - - now they want to even drag religion into Christmas!"

The cartoon and the cartoonist notwithstanding, that's exactly what God had in mind when He thought up Christmas. For Christmas, you know, was God's idea. He was all wrapped up in it, so much so that, properly understood, you can't think of Christmas without Him. The first Christmas sermon ever preached was delivered by God's special messenger, and the first congregation was a couple of simple devout men who were watching their sheep. But even with that congregation, devout as they were, God, preacher-fashion, was not about to take any chances. He not only declared what He was talking about in His sermon, He not only said it, but in the saying of it He gave an interpretation:

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David - -

...this is the interpretation:

"It's a Saviour who is born for you."

God's not about to take any chances with our obtuseness. He never has. That's why He spells things out quite clearly for us. He's forever doing something. He's a very busy God. Not just because He wants to be kept busy, but while He busies Himself He's acting in our behalf. And whenever He has us in mind it's something good that He wants done for us. He wants this to be understood quite plainly, that He's not just a busy God, but He's busy because He's up to something that we need, that we ought to have, that only He can supply. That's why, wouldn't you say, that when His special agents came to make the announcement, that they not only told about the Event-of-Events that was about to take place in Bethlehem, but they also told exactly what it meant - - a child is being born. But not just any child - - - a child who is to become the Saviour of all mankind.

But alas and alack, to this very day there are any number of people who just haven't quite figured out what it was that God was up to that night. It wasn't as though man hasn't longed for God to do something extraordinary. Most of us want God to be up to something, particularly if we stand to benefit by it. And it isn't as though mankind throughout the years hasn't gone longing and waiting for something or for someone. That play -- was it the last decade or when was it? -- time passes so quickly.....in which the character goes on waiting and waiting and waiting for someone to show up....

...but Goudet (?) never comes.

Not so the Christian. The Christian goes on waiting, of course, but he has to wait no longer. For the one for whom he longs and the one whom he expects has already come. The divine invasion has taken place - - God has arrived - - it's a matter of historical fact.

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But again it has to be said, for a good many people it doesn't seem to make much difference whatsoever - - He came, but you'd never tell it by their actions. It's made no difference in their lives whatsoever.

A very perceptive mind now comes and tells us that maybe Jesus Christ came to some - - to some in the sense that none of us was quite ready for Him. He was way out ahead of His time - - so far ahead of His time that most of us have never caught up with Him.

Our student, Jon, sends me clippings every now and then, things that he feels I ought to read. His, too, was a very clever clipping, another cartoon. The cartoonist has a hippie-like character, and the hippie-like character is responding to what's being spread out in the cartoon, the good news of God-come-in-Christ, and Christ saying, "This is my command, that you love one another"

...and the reaction of the hippie-like character is:

"What a great idea! Too bad it never caught on!"

Is this what's to be said of Christmas, 1969? - - that ours is the plight of people who have never just quite caught on as to what it all means?

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour - - "

....God wants us to catch on. He wants us to understand what He's done. It's not a new philosophy that He's let loose in the world, it's not a new moral principle, it's not just another teacher - - - but a Saviour. And in God's understanding of human nature, this is what men need most.

And what is a saviour? A saviour is a person who comes to rescue us, to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. And, I submit to you, this is the

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Great hang-up for modern man. For modern man is a very proud individual, a very strong-minded individual, a very determined individual. What is there that modern man says can't be done, granted there's the determination to see it through?

So we're overcome by the misery of our day - - we schedule meetings and we plan programs, and we gather funds, and we endeavor to make on this earth a bit of heaven.....

...very properly so, we say we'll get rid of the slums...

...very properly so, we say we'll put clothing on the backs of the ill-clad....

...very properly so, we say we will give food to the hungry....

...very properly so, we will raise the dignity of the disadvantaged and the ignored and the persecuted....

...very properly so, we say we'll get rid of war...

...we shout it, we work to that end...

But the misery remains. And poverty just doesn't seem to get wiped off the face of the earth, no matter how much we spend. And ask any well-intentioned and very capable person who spends all of his energy in trying to alleviate the needs of the physically and the culturally deprived, he will tell you it's like trying to minister to a problem that remains endless. It becomes every single one of us to stretch forth his hand to help, but I beg you with all the ardor of my soul to remember that if this is to be done by man's effort and by man's effort alone, that it will never be accomplished. We may endeavor to improve the situation, but the predicament of man remains.

Man's predicament is that he's a sinner, he is alienated from God and

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he is alienated from his brother. If he doesn't watch out, no matter how much he may give to improve the situation of his brother, if his heart is not right, there is no reconciliation. Perhaps there is no sin quite as great as a hand stretched forth to feed the hungry but never knows how to identify as a brother.

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The good news of Christmas is that God has come to us and identified in the human struggle.....the good news of Christmas is that God has come to us and reconciled sinners to Himself and to one another. But the last thing that a man seems to want to say about himself is that he is a sinner. And how can a man in a perilous strait ever be rescued if he doesn't realize his peril?

This is one reason why the Church goes on reminding us of the doctrine of original sin, the depravity of human nature, for this is man's predicament. Man cannot save himself. Man can never muster enough love to meet his own need, let alone to meet the need of other people. Only God can do this for us. <u>This</u> is the good news of Christmas.

There was an atheist once who for some reason that he couldn't quite explain to himself stepped inside the lovely Church of the Madeline in Paris. The Mass was going on, and he heard the chanting, and with his learning he could appreciate it....."Agnus Dei, qui talis picati mundi . . " ..."Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world . . "

...and he exclaimed, "If only it were true!"

Christmas says, it is true. The world says, it will be true for us only if we find it true in those who believe, and the finger of indictment of Nietsche still rests upon every single one of us: "You will have to look and act more like the redeemed if you want me to believe in your Redeemer."

* * * *

Prayer - Pastor David Shaheen
The Fourth Sunday in Advent December 21, 1969

O GOD, We remember at this Christmas-time how the Eternal Word became flesh and dwelt among us: and we thank You that Jesus took our human body upon Him so that we could never again dare to despise, neglect or misuse the body, since You made it Your dwelling-place.

WE THANK YOU that Jesus did a day's work like any working man, that He knew the problems of living together in a family, that He knew the frustration and irritation of serving the public, that He had to earn a living and face all the routine of daily life, and yet so clothed each common task with glory.

WE THANK YOU that He shared in all happy social occasions, that He was at home at weddings and at dinners and at festivals in the homes of simple, ordinary people like ourselves. Grant that we may ever remember that in His unseen presence He is the guest in every home.

WE THANK YOU that He knew what friendship means, that He had His own circle of friends whom He wanted to be with, that He also knew what it means to be let down, to suffer from disloyalty and from failure of love.

WE THANK YOU that He, too, had to bear unfair criticism, prejudiced opposition, malicious and deliberate misunderstanding.

WE THANK YOU that whatever happens to us, He has been there before, and that because He has gone through things, He is able to help those who are going through them.

HELP US, O GOD, never to forget that He knows life because He lived life, and that He is with us at all times to enable us to live victoriously.

OUR FATHER.....

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Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Christmas Eve December 24, 1969

"AND YOU WILL FIND - A BABY"

Because of what happened that Holy Night,
now it can be said, and said in this way:
Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and from Jesus Christ His Son, our Blessed
Lord. Amen.

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Bear with me patiently, will you? I'll try to recall it for you. I'm thinking now of an illustration that was quite popular with preachers about a decade ago, when they came to this particular season of the year. I never heard it in a sermon that was preached, but I came upon it in some cursory reading. I think it went like this:

A group of people had been corralled and offered their services to present, on Christmas Eve, an interpretation of that night in Bethlehem. The cast was carefully chosen, the stage hands were instructed as to what they were to do, and all went well during the rehearsals. It was the intention of the director that the impact was to be made at a precise moment, after there had been quite a cacophony of sound and quite an interplay of varigated lights, then there was to be stark silence, and all the lights in the room were to be extinguished except one - - a scarcely discernible ray of light to be focused upon the Christ Child in the manger.....

....when the night came, all went well until this precise point...a blundering stage-hand turned off all the lights. There were those in the audience who heard the voice of an infuriated director saying, "Hey, you, you switched off the light on the baby! - - get that light back on!"

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The world's a blundering stage-hand. It, too, switches the light off the Christ Child and leaves Him in man-created darkness. Quite contrary, of course, to the way God intended it. The way God intended it, when God thought up Christmas, He turned the lights on that night. He had one very special light that was not to be extinguished, the Star of Bethlehem that went shining and shining.....and then there were those who followed the light that they saw that was quite different from any other light. And when they came to journey's end, the light was focused on, of all things, a baby.....

...yet that's exactly what wise men pursued, a light that led them to a baby.

Not always recognized as such, but one of the greatest of all texts in Scripture is a verse that was read tonight as the Gospel Lesson:

" - - and you will find a baby - - "

Oh, you walk into any room where there happens to be a baby and you give the baby attention at once, but it's only passing attention. Very shortly you give yourself to adult conversation and doing adult things....and it's only when the baby commands attention that you pay heed to it again. The lesson was brought home to me quite forcibly some months ago. The three-and-a-half-year old grandchild was visiting at the Parsonage of the Senior Pastor. He walked from the living room out on to the porch, climbed up on a chair, and put that little face of his into his tiny hand, crossed his legs, and, quite adult-fashion, said, "Let's talk." His grandfather and his grandmother obliged him, but only for a while. Shortly thereafter they found themselves talking only to each other, and the child was made very much aware of this.....until in a very uninhibited manner he said, "But you're not listening!" The adult world has that way with children - - we have a way of turning them off.

God never intended it that way. When God came to us as He has never come before, nor since, He wrapped Himself up completely in a baby. Now what's to be said about that? To begin with, a baby is a human being. No human being can ever afford to have the light taken away from it. The crowning glory of all God's created things, the human being, and no human being is more precious than a human being in its infant stage, for then we come upon it in its helplessness, which means it cannot be ignored. That's one thing that can be said.

The second thing about a new-born babe is that it comes fresh to us from out of this world. God may see fit to use two human beings as His partners in the act of procreation, but any human being must be seen as bearing upon it, particularly in its infant stage, the divine imprimatur, the stamp of God. Despite the fact that it's little, it cannot be ignored.

One looks upon a baby with hope, a future yet to be unfolded. One looks upon a baby as God saying to the world, "Well, here's another chance - - I've not given up hope in the human race." And to prove it, God empties Himself, humanizes Himself, and comes down and becomes Exhibit A.

I frankly admit in your presence, an admission that's not necessary for some of you who have come to know me quite well, but within the past few years I've had my share of brooding moments. I cannot say that I have thoroughly enjoyed the '60s. I had hoped that they would be serene years. There are some of us, you know, who reach a certain point in life and we think that we're entitled to a plateau, that maybe we can go now for a certain period without any marked depression, and without any great hills to ascend that might call for an inordinate amount of energy.....that perchance on the basis of prior performance we might take it a little bit easier and enjoy a period

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of tranquillity. But who can say that the '60s have been a period of serenity? For some of us, there's almost a decade that we'd like to forget. I've taken myself to task on more than one occasion to allow myself to brood, and to experience one moment of despair after another. I hope you haven't caught too much of it.

But one of the grand and glorious things about the Christmas-tide is that it perpetually renews our faith in the future and a God whose hand directs the future. For Christmas has to deal with a baby coming into the world. There was once a man, quite a historian, and he wanted to impress upon people that history could be written on the basis of decisive battles that have been fought, that as you go back and look at all the years that have come and transpired, that you could pin-point this battle and say that from that point onward the world has never been the same. He said that there were 15 such battles in history, 15 battles that changed the courses of history.

...a wise preacher once observed, "Why, that's nothing, just to talk about decisive battles. I'd like to build a case for decisive babies, who once they were born and brought into the world, changed the course of history. The world has never been the same since they came.

So you and I go on, year after year, remembering the birth of that Baby.

It was the year 1809. Europe was in the slough of despair. The tiny giant Napoleon was having his thud being heard as his troops marched throughout Europe. People talked about him -- unkindly, and in ugly terms. It was a rather miserable day in which to live....

> ...but the year 1809 was also a year in which babies were being born.....

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...Abraham Lincoln...

...Charles Darwin....

...Edgar Allen Poe....

....Cyrus McCormick.....

...Alfred Lord Tennyson.....

...Felix Mendelssohn....

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One now will soon face another decade. Will it be a time of despair? Will our souls know one anguish after another? How dare I stand at this sacred desk with the Good Book in front of me, and on this Night when we celebrate the birth of a Babe that changed the course of the world, that has changed countless numbers of lives, and will continue to do so, without a measure of hope? Take me to task, will you, if I ever allow my soul to know despair again. The great theology of our day -- did you know it? -- is a theology of hope, a resurgence. TIME magazine has also caught it in its most recent issue. Right on the very front -- "Is God Coming To Life Again?"

....the sequel, of course, to its magazine article of a number of months ago when it had emblazoned upon its cover: "God Is Dead!"

I want to close this Christmas message of 1969 to you by telling you about what happened in a certain city ravaged by an earthquake in southern Europe. As you might surmise, there was ruin and devastation everywhere. Only a few survivors, and they had their heads cast downward. What was there to live for in the face of so much ruin? But they had their mind and their mood transformed when suddenly there appeared a Jesuit priest who walked among them with a baby in his arms. The baby is always God's sign of another day....and because of that Baby, a better day. This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Prayer - Pastor David Shaheen
Christmas Eve December 24, 1969

O GOD, OUR HEAVENLY FATHER, We thank You for this Christmas-tide, that

this is the time when families re-unite, that this is the time when those who have gone to work and live in other places take the road home, that this is the time when we meet again in the family circle.

O GOD, We give You thanks for the Christmas gifts we give and receive, for the joy of children at Christmas-time, that for once we discover that it is really more blessed to give than to receive, for all that Christmas meant and means, that at the first Christmas-time, Jesus, our Blessed Lord, was born into this world, that the Word became flesh, that Your Mind became a Person, and that we can see Your glory and Your love in the face of Jesus Christ.

For this we give You thanks, O God.

O GOD, OUR FATHER, Bless those for whom there will be little Christmas joy. those in poverty and need, those who are aged and lonely and forgotten, and left behind in a world from which all their loved ones and their friends have gone, those who have no one of their own to remember them; any into whose family circle there has come sorrow, all the more bitter because it came at Christmas-time.

Bless all such, O God. Help us in the midst of our joy to remember others for whom life is not as sweet as it is for us.

Especially, O God, we ask You to bless those we love and from whom we are separated, those in other towns and countries, those in the distant places of the earth, those on the Seven Seas.

Bless those who do not know where their loved ones are, and those who are waiting for letters which are slow to come;

And if there are any who have quarreled, or who have drifted apart, bring them together again before the memory of Christmas is gone.

HEAR THESE, our prayers, O God, for Your love's sake. Amen.

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(Incomplete)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Holy Innocents, Martyrs — December 28, 1969

" - - AND HIS MOTHER"
(Matthew 2:13)

> We're not fooling ourselves, O God, we know full well that the world is too much with us, and even as we've marked the path that leads to this holy place, we do bring dragging along behind us all the fears that so easily beset us, and the sins that weigh down our wicked hearts. Yet, O God, if only for a little while, cleanse us, make us quiet. Perchance it could be your voice that would be heard. Amen.

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You probably won't believe this. Undoubtedly most of you will find it a bit far-fetched, but I'll tell it to you just the same. Maybe I can cushion it a bit for you by telling that it's a legend. But before I tell it to you, you ought to know that it has to deal with the fact that Mary, Joseph and the Holy Child had to leave Bethlehem and go to Egypt. Wicked as the king was, he did put stock in that rumor of angels, and he did believe that there could be a threat to him and to his kingdom.....so Herod, as every Sunday School scholar knows, issued the drastic order:

> Every single child under two years of age was to be slaughtered in Judea.

God got word to Mary and to Joseph and said, "Now you take the child and get on the road - - go as fast as you can and as far as you can to get away from Herod's reach."

Now, this is the story:

> As the Holy Family traveled by night and by day, they

COPY

became weary, and occasionally they had to stop. They naturally were seeking a refuge and shelter. One night they came to an open cave, and Joseph, presumably, said, "This will do the thing for us tonight." ...and they entered.

...oh, I neglected to tell you, it was a cold winter's night, and there was frost in evidence everywhere.....

Now at the entrance to the cave there was a spider. The revelation was made to the spider that this was no ordinary baby being cradled in that woman's arms - - this was the Christ Child. Now, even for spiders, the Christ Child awakened a response - - - - - everyone who is ever confronted by the Christ Child, if he has any sensitivity at all, says, "I wonder what I can do for Him, I wonder what I can give Him."

...it was for the spider to do what only a spider could do -- and the spider said, "I will spin for Him a web"....the spider reasoned within himself and said, "It's a cold night, and maybe the web that I spin across the entrance to the cave will serve as a curtain to buffet the winds of a winter's night." .....so the spider spun his web.

Shortly thereafter frost settled upon the delicate

threads of the web. Then, as you might surmise, Herod's soldiers came. The commanding officer said, "Ah, a cave! Search it!" His lieutenant turned and said, as he approached the cave, "But there's no use - - anyone can see that no one's gone in here lately - - to have done so would have been to break a web that's been spun here." Said the commanding officer, "We must make haste. There are other places to search. Be on the road! Spend no more time here!"

...only a story.

...far-fetched? ....a legend? ...hard to believe? Well, now, be careful. What will you do with those other reports that we receive? - - -

- - what, now, will you make of shepherds, stalwart men, who said that they saw angels? -- who said that they not only saw angels, but that they heard angels, and they heard them sing, and they honestly believed what they saw and what they heard....and they followed the road that led to Bethlehem-town.....

- - what, now, will you make of those very learned men, referred to as 'wise men from another land', who came and followed irresistibly a Star that kept shining? - - what will you make of that?

- - what will you make of that peasant girl, a virgin unspotted, untouched even by the man who claimed her heart . . . . .

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